

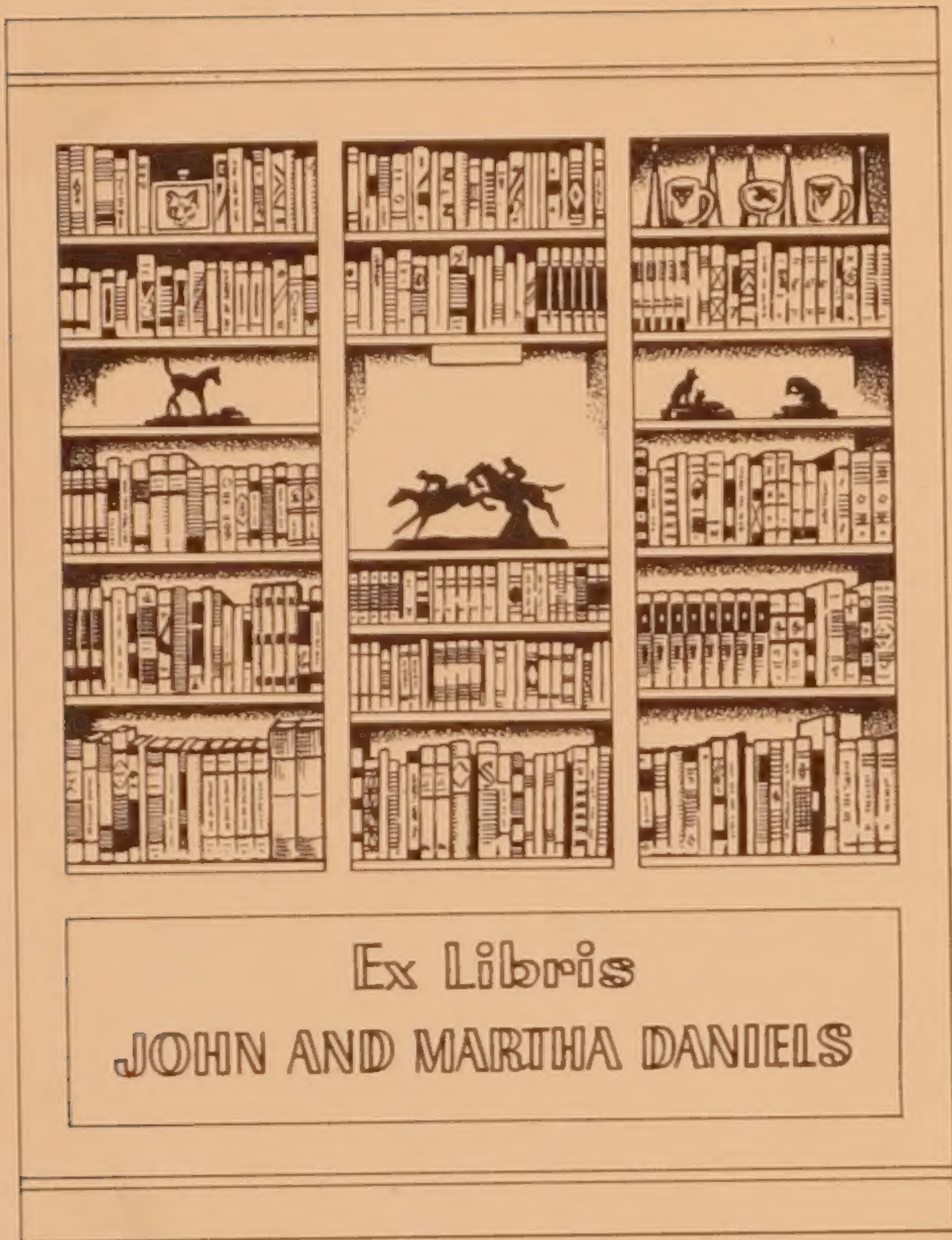
HENRY ALKEN

WALTER SHAW SPARROW



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No...7.....

Theodore A. Cook



THE SPORT OF OUR FATHERS

VOLUME I.

HENRY ALKEN











FROM THE HIGH METTLED RACER SERIES



PLATE I.—THE FOAL.

*From a drawing by Henry Alken, in the Oliver Behrens Collection.*



# HENRY ALKEN

By

WALTER SHAW SPARROW

*With Eight Plates in Colour and  
Sixty-four Subjects in Half-tone*

BEING THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE SERIES  
THE SPORT OF OUR FATHERS

*WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY*

SIR THEODORE COOK  
EDITOR OF THE *FIELD*

LONDON: WILLIAMS AND NORGATE, LTD.  
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## THE SPORT OF OUR FATHERS

By SIR THEODORE COOK

EDITOR OF THE *FIELD*

**I**F every new book nowadays needs justification for its existence, still more true is this of a new series ; and I am lucky to have a task so easy as to explain why the volumes—of which *Henry Alken* is the first—have been planned by the *Field* and issued by Messrs. Williams and Norgate in Great Britain, and Messrs. Scribners in America.

Without the slightest doubt the taste for old sporting prints and pictures has enormously increased of late on both sides of the Atlantic, and these books are produced for the benefit of every reader who can speak English wherever he may live. A series of the kind is without doubt badly needed. The late Sir Walter Gilbey's *Animal Painters* has long been out of date, and gives too little information. In *British Sporting Artists* (John Lane) Mr. Walter Shaw Sparrow has discoursed, with his usual scholarship and charm, of many matters which his research has brought to light, and for anyone who desires to possess a kind of general encyclopædia of the subject in a beautiful form there is nothing better ; but again, there are not enough details about each artist. In the late Captain Siltzer's *Story of British Sporting Prints* (Hutchinson) the collector will find an invaluable catalogue to guide his purchases, but without enough illustrations to complete the subject. Our new series not only concentrates rather on original paintings and drawings than on prints (though the latter, of course, are far from neglected), but it gives an incomparably larger field of illustration than has ever been covered before, with the object of educating our readers' eyes in the style and character of the artist, so that they may in future be able to judge for themselves, to avoid forgeries, and to gain personal knowledge at first hand.



This paramount question of illustration has only been made possible by the co-operation of the *Field* newspaper with the publishers. In 1925 the *Field* printed the first edition of the *Autobiography of Squire Osbaldeston*, which was subsequently published in book form by the Bodley Head. During its preparation by Mr. E. D. Cuming, the editor appealed for help in the way of portraits and other material, and the response from all over England was overwhelming. It was evident that a treasure-house of Art, unknown or at any rate unappreciated, still existed in this country. Three great collections, those of Mr. Oliver Behrens, of Sir William Greenall (now Lord Daresbury) and of Mr. Oswald Magniac have made the opening book of this series a better presentation of the whole art of Henry Alken than was ever possible before. That process is typical of the rest. Undiscovered masterpieces by Ben Marshall, Stubbs, Wootton, Ferneley, Herring, and others have reached us, by the gracious permission of His Majesty, from Windsor, and by the unending kindness of other owners from Belvoir, Welbeck, Badminton, Longleat, Raby Castle, Newmarket, Lavington, Petworth, and many another home of sport. All will be acknowledged in due season. But it is right at once to emphasise the fact that the majority of our illustrations are not only from the originals, but often from originals that have never been reproduced before in any form.

One result of all this is that the series will appeal to a far wider public than is to be found in the select circles of the wealthy connoisseur-collector. There are many more readers to-day than was ever the case before who wish to take an intelligent personal interest in a form of distinctively national art which is only just beginning to be widely recognised at its true value. To them these volumes will be especially appropriate. To every Englishman who cares for those great open-air recreations which have made our country what it is and produced a breed which has held its own against any other in the world, these pages will unfold a record racy of the soil, full of that healthy freedom in enjoyment which our ancestors bequeathed to us, instinct with the true spirit of sportsmanship and daring and endurance which is at the bottom of the best of England's history.



From no other source can such vivid and faithful pictures of the life of the people, of the squire, of the great aristocrat, be drawn ; and this is why, though the subject matter may be chiefly English, its appeal will be just as wide and deep to all that English-speaking community across the Atlantic, which has modelled its great sporting manifestations upon ours and lent them a lustre all its own. The foundations of both these wonderful developments are in essence the same, however widely apart in certain cases the varieties of climate or of individual resources may have led them ; and here, in books like those on Henry Alken, on Stubbs, or on Wootton, you may see that common foundation more clearly than in all the arid leagues of dusty histories that ever filled a library.

It is worth adding, too, that in the biographies of such almost forgotten Masters, a very great number of new facts have been discovered, and it is not too much to say that fresh light will be thrown, in many instances throughout this series, upon the lives and characters of men who have done as much as any of their contemporaries to hand on to us the best of the life they knew, and to inspire in us the unconquerable determination to preserve those bright traditions.

Have you ever thought of a reason for the real joy a great artist feels (and lets you see him feel) in his painting ? It comes largely from the fact that a great work of art—whatever be its medium or its size—is not merely as truly the result of his creative power as a man's son or daughter, but chiefly and more evidently is a real addition to the stock of beauty in the world around us—as real as a sunset in the evening sky or as a moorland with the dawn upon its dewdrops. These things may come back with each recurring day, but we—for whom Nature's silent pageantry is spread—do not, perhaps cannot, always enjoy it or even seek it as we might. But Art, by the single touch of human genius, can preserve for an eternity the fleeting spell of momentary scenes, the sudden thrill of some great instant in the lives of ourselves or of others, in such a form that it is a permanent possession within our reach for ever, bestowing upon us and upon generations yet unborn the magic gift of feeling what

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the artist felt and seeing what he saw a hundred—nay, many a hundred years ago.

Take the first book in this series, the *Henry Alken*, as an example. Here you may see those dashing young officers—called the “Nightriders of Nacton”—careering over the fields by moonlight ; or ride with George Osbaldeston over the cream of the Quorn Country ; or listen to Nimrod reading the articles before the start of the Grand Leicestershire Steeplechase of 1829 ; or see Captain Ross making the pace on Polecat, and Dick Christian coming an imperial crumpler, and Field Nicholson on Magic winning a great race by only half a length. And think what a wealth of memories and beauty lies in our other volumes. There you may see Flying Dutchman in his match with Voltigeur, or watch the St. Leger in 1846 in all the brilliancy, the glowing ardour, the resonant enthusiasm of Doncaster, so vividly portrayed that the old Yorkshire roar seems almost echoing in your ears as the flying feet of those splendid horses sweep nearer and nearer to the winning post. There you may meet and know many a charming character out of a Past that becomes almost as familiar and dear as any Present, for you shall exchange salutes with fascinating old gentlemen like Lord Douglas Saxby, as he paces slowly by on his black horse ; or bow to the gallant figures of Lord Albanley and Lord Eglinton, superbly mounted and ready for the chase ; or smile at that hard-bitten varmint of a huntsman, Thomas Oldaker on Pickle ; or watch (in Ferneley’s finest painting) young Harry Goodricke taking a gate while the Squire flies the nearest fence on his magnificent hunter, a perfect embodiment of that noblest sight on earth, a good man on a good horse and both at full stretch across a glorious country. That reader would be a dull dog indeed whose blood was not fired by such meetings, by such sparkling scenes of pleasure, by such triumphs of horsemanship, endurance or of speed. Here, in the books of this series, within so small an area of time and space, you may share the happiness of two centuries or more with the men who helped so much to make it. The mere mention of these things reminds me how much we all owe to the past, and how delightfully





SQUIRE OSBALDESTON ON *Tranby* DURING HIS WAGER OF 200 MILES AGAINST TIME, NOVEMBER 5, 1831.  
From G. Hunt's engraving after Henry Alken.

[By courtesy of Messrs. Fores, Piccadilly.]







we may double all our present pleasures if we remember something of the years on which our life was founded. Books may help a little. But nothing bridges the gap with a charm so vital and so lasting as a good picture.

Quite naturally, the Americans do not possess so many first-rate sporting pictures as we still have in England. But death duties have made their fatal inroad already, and alas ! will make yet more ; and if Americans go on buying as they have been since the war the balance will very soon be level. In the works of Seymour or Wootton, in the masterly Stubbs, the laughing Rowlandson, the somewhat wooden Sartorius, the graceful Wolstenholme, or the great Ben Marshall, you will find the true commemoration of many men and things which had as much influence on sport in America as in England. Americans have realised that what they enjoy to-day has sprung from the same virile fount which gave us the English turf and English hunting. Sport has no frontiers. It may be loved more by those who know the many details it implies ; but it is loved in his degree by every man that is a man at all in every English-speaking country in the world. So the old records of racing or of the fox are the common spiritual stock of the best men on both sides of the Atlantic ; alike in literature and in art we draw a common inspiration from that splendid heritage. " Nimrod " wrote the best account of a great run which had been seen up to his day. But the full beauty of it would have still been lacking if the first quarter of the nineteenth century had not also produced an Alken to make it live before our eyes, to let us breathe the very atmosphere of the shires they both knew ; or if Ferneley had not given us, in that glorious view of the Coplow-Ranksborough Run, the true fire and splendour of the chase, the utter confidence of Assheton in his rider, of the bold horseman in his mount, of all their comrades who sweep forward, following or right up level, just behind the hounds.

Over Lord Rosebery's mantelpiece in the dining-room at Durdans is a magnificent painting by Herring of the Flying Dutchman, almost lifesize, one of the most impressive pictures of its kind I ever beheld. It



matters nothing to me that you will never see a horse upon a racecourse with all four feet fully extended and all off the ground at once. The cinematograph may give us horrid facts which seemed at first as unpleasant to look at as the "monkey on a stick" with which Tod Sloan replaced the gallant figure of Fred Archer, sitting back with silken hands upon a long rein and driving his horse before him. The one has come to stay as surely as the other. And since what we "see" is a matter not of mechanical optics only, but of the brain behind the eye as well, we shall never see again such a splendid presentment of the thoroughbred in his breathless triumph as Herring's "Flying Dutchman." And that is one reason why I love it. The other is a development in the history of sport in art which always seems to me to be the best proof in the world that the subject of this series is as a matter of fact and truth one of the things which has interested humanity longer than any other.

It might be imagined that Herring and his predecessors took their convention for the galloping horse from the easily-visible greyhound. Not so. The story is far longer. The horse is depicted as Herring drew him in the carvings of those ancient people of Mycenæ who lived before the siege of Troy, a thousand years before Christ; and probably it was the same ten centuries earlier still. But the Mycenæan horse at the outstretched gallop has survived in ancient arabesques of gold on steel until this day. The same typical style passed slowly through the generations to the Far East till it reached Japan and China. From Chinese pictures and carvings it was taken by artists of the time of Chippendale in the first half of the eighteenth century. From these again, such sporting artists as Seymour, or Wootton, Stubbs, or Ben Marshall passed it on to Alken, to Ferneley, and to Herring. The instantaneous photograph killed it, and our artists have not yet imagined anything to replace it. But I have emphasised it here because it is a link in that long chain of sport in art which goes back, far beyond Mycenæ, to the ancient tribes who carved their running reindeer on a piece of bone; and farther still, to that dim dawn of prehistoric man, at least five and twenty thousand years ago, to the

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first real picture which the earliest art we know has bequeathed to us. And what is its subject? Sport. It was carved upon a round cylinder. It was indecipherable until that cylinder had been inked and rolled out upon white paper. The resulting group, slightly imperfect from its extreme age, was reconstituted for the *Field* by Sir Ray Lankester and Walter Winans. It showed a group of red deer being hunted, the fawns and hinds in front, the big stag as their rearguard and every blank space in the design is filled with leaping salmon.

Consider with what amazing detail we could illustrate the best history of mankind if that sort of work had gone on. Though there are traces of the same love of sport in the wood-carvings of the Gothic cathedrals in France and England, we really find very little connected and deliberate effort until Gaston de Foix had his *Hunting Book* illuminated. Even in England, supposed to be the mother of sport, it was not from English origins that her sporting art arose. Foreigners elaborated it from Francis Cleyn, who died in 1658, to Emil Adam who painted "Bend Or" for the Duke of Westminster and "Ladas" for Lord Rosebery. The names of Tillemans, a Fleming; of Sartorius, a German; of Alken, a Dane; of Herring, a Dutch-American; all show how much we owe to foreign influence. Yet we settled slowly, as is our habit, into our own ways. In Stubbs, above all in Ben Marshall, we found our favourite type. The foreigners may have done our art as much good as the "Darley Arabian" did our turf, or as "Sharke" did for American breeders. But we developed our own "Eclipse" and our own Ferneley; and so will they. The hearty healthy love of open-air sports and pastimes is the true foundation of the strength of all the English-speaking races. The sign and signal of that love is Sport in Art.

T. A. C.







## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION TO HENRY ALKEN. By SIR THEODORE COOK, Editor of the <i>Field</i>	xvii
AUTHOR'S FOREWORD . . . . .	xxiii
CHAPTER ONE.—HENRY ALKEN HIMSELF . . . . .	I
CHAPTER TWO.—HENRY ALKEN HIMSELF ( <i>continued</i> ). . . . .	9
CHAPTER THREE.—HENRY ALKEN AND COMPOSITION . . . . .	24
CHAPTER FOUR.—H. A. ON JUMPING AND PACE . . . . .	32
CHAPTER FIVE.—H. A. ON JUMPING AND PACE ( <i>continued</i> ). . . . .	38
CHAPTER SIX.—THE ALKENS AND THEIR BIRTHPLACE . . . . .	45







## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
THE FOAL. <i>From the High Mettled Racer Series</i> . . . . .	Frontispiece
PLATES IN COLOUR	
THE HUNTING FIELD: TALLY HO! <i>The Oliver Behrens Collection</i> . . . . .	Facing 4
THE HUNTING FIELD: FULL CRY. <i>The Oliver Behrens Collection</i> . . . . .	Facing 23
A STEEPLECHASE. A Set of Six Drawings in the Oliver Behrens Collection:	
1. The Start. Off They Go—with White for Choice.	
2. Going over an Old Blind Roadway, and Doing it Well: Even Betting.	
3. A Slap at a Stone Enclosure: 5 to 4 on White.	
4. Crossing a Deep Ravine Dangerous to Pass—with 6 to 2 on White.	
5. Covering a Strong Bullock Fence. Down for a Hundred! Any Odds on White.	
6. The Winner. "And to such wondrous Doing brought His Horse."— <i>Hamlet</i> .	
	Between pp. 40 and 41
HALF-TONE ILLUSTRATIONS	
SQUIRE OSBALDESTON ON <i>Tranby</i> DURING HIS WAGER OF 200 MILES AGAINST TIME. <i>From G. Hunt's Engraving after Henry Alken. By Courtesy of Messrs. Fores</i> . . . . .	Facing viii
PIGEON SHOOTING AT THE RED HOUSE CLUB IN 1828, FOR THE GOLD CUP . . . . .	Facing xvi
PAGE OF SKETCHES IN SOFT GROUND ETCHING. Two Subjects. <i>From Henry Alken's "Sporting Scrapbook," 1824</i> . . . . .	Facing 1
STUDIES IN HORSEMANSHIP. <i>From Henry Alken's "Moments of Fancy," 1823</i> . . . . .	Facing 2
STUDIES OF HORSES AND A TURK. <i>From Henry Alken's "Sporting Scrapbook," 1824</i> . . . . .	Facing 2
THE NIGHT RIDERS OF NACTON. Four Original Water Colours by Henry Alken. <i>Now in the Willard S. Martin Collection:</i>	
1. Preparing to Start from the Cavalry Barracks at Ipswich.	
2. Whoop! And Away! The Large Field near Biles's Corner.	
3. The Last Field near Nacton Heath.	
4. The Finish. Nacton Church and Village . . . . .	
	Between pp. 8 and 9
A SET OF FOUR ORIGINAL WATER-COLOURS BY HENRY ALKEN. <i>In the Collection of Major Oswald Magniac:</i>	
1. Drawing the Cover.	
2. Gone Away.	
3. Over the Water.	
4. The Death . . . . .	
	Between pp. 12 and 13
A MELTONIAN. GOING TO THE MEET. <i>Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection</i> . . . . .	Facing 16
THE HUNTING FIELD: 1. Charging a Stile and a Ditched Fence.	
THE HUNTING FIELD: 2. Taking a Toss with a Variety of Effects. <i>From Two Original Hunting Skits by Henry Alken. The Oliver Behrens Collection</i> . . . . .	Between pp. 16 and 17
FROM "THE REAL M." SERIES. How to Qualify for a Meltonian. Two Plates:	
1. How to go to Cover.	
2. How to Take the Lead.	
<i>From Original Proof Engravings, untinted, by Henry Alken. In General Cowie's Collection</i> . . . . .	
	Facing 17



	PAGE
THE HUNTING FIELD : At Full Gallop. <i>The Oliver Behrens Collection</i> . . . . .	Facing 18
RENEWAL OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH HOUNDS. <i>From an Oil Painting by Henry Gordon Alken. By the Courtesy of Messrs. Fores.</i> . . . .	Facing 20
" I HAVE A NOTION THAT THIS IS WHAT IS CALLED A BOG . . ." <i>From an Original Water-colour by Henry Alken. Major Oswald Magniac's Collection</i> . . . . .	Facing 21
AFTERNOON : A FEW OF THE RIGHT SORT WHO HAVE DONE THE THING. <i>The Oliver Behrens Collection</i> . . . . .	Facing 21
A SOFT GROUND ETCHING SHOWING MOVEMENTS IN THE STANDING LEAP . . . . .	Facing 24
DRAWING THE COVER. <i>From an Oil-Colour in Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection</i> . . . . .	25
FROM THE HIGH METTLED RACER SERIES. Plate II.—Lunging the Colt. <i>The Oliver Behrens Collection</i> . . . . .	26
SPORTSMEN AND HOUNDS OUTSIDE A VILLAGE INN. <i>The Oliver Behrens Collection</i> . . . . .	28
FROM THE HIGH-METTLED RACER SERIES. Plate IV.—The Hunter . . . . .	28
SEPTEMBER : PARTRIDGE SHOOTING. <i>From an Oil Painting by Henry Alken. Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection</i> . . . . .	30
THE LEICESTERSHIRE COVERS SERIES : Four Original Drawings in the Oliver Behrens Collection :	
1. The Meet at Kirby Gate.	
2. Breaking Cover—Billesdon Coplow.	
3. Full Cry—Whissendine Pasture.	
4. The Death—View of Kettleby . . . . .	Between pp. 32 and 33
THE HUNTING FIELD : FORWARD AWAY ! . . . . .	34
HUNTING RECOLLECTIONS. <i>From a set of Six Original Oil Paintings by Henry Alken. Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection</i> . . . . .	Between pp. 36 and 37
FULL CRY IN A FAVOURING COUNTRY. <i>From an Oil Painting in Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection</i> . . . . .	38
THE KILL. <i>From an Oil Painting in the Daresbury Collection</i> . . . . .	Between pp. 38 and 39
HIS FIRST RACE. <i>The Oliver Behrens Collection.</i> . . . .	Between pp. 38 and 39
STEEPLECHASING—AT THE BROOK . . . . .	Between pp. 38 and 39
FROM THE QUORN HUNT SERIES :	
Plate I.—The Meet at Ashby Pastures. <i>By Courtesy of Messrs. Robson &amp; Co.</i> . . . .	Facing 42
THE QUORN HUNT SERIES :	
Plate III.—Tally Ho ! And Away.	
Plate VI.—Second Horses—Full Cry.	
Plate VII.—The Whissendine.	
<i>By Courtesy of Messrs. Robson &amp; Co.</i> . . . . .	Between pp. 44 and 45
THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE, 1829. Plates I. and II. <i>From the Series of Eight small Oil Paintings by Henry Alken in Major Oswald Magniac's Collection</i> . . . . .	Between pp. 46 and 47
THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE, 1829. Plates Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight. . . . .	Between pp. 48 and 49
HENRY ALKEN'S BIRTHPLACE : DUFOURS PLACE, BROAD STREET, GOLDEN SQUARE, LONDON. . . . .	Facing 50
LANDSCAPE WITH ANGLER LANDING A FISH . . . . .	50
TWO HUNTING SCENES. Alken School Pictures . . . . .	Between pp. 50 and 51
HORSEMAN TROTting. Alken School Picture . . . . .	Facing 52
GROUSE SHOOTING. By Sam Alken—Query Senior or Junior ? . . . . .	Facing 52
HUNTERS AT COVER SIDE—FLY AND DASH. A Chestnut and a Brown Horse, once the Property of Colonel Thornton. <i>Aquatinted by J. Pollard, 1822, after a Picture by S. Alken. By courtesy of Messrs. Fores</i> . . . . .	53





PIGEON SHOOTING AT THE RED HOUSE CLUB, 1828, AQUATINTED BY R. G. RIEVES. THE PAINTING  
AFTER HENRY ALKEN.  
The very rare print from which this is reproduced was kindly lent by Messrs. Ackermann, of Bond Street.







## INTRODUCTION TO HENRY ALKEN

THE personalities of most of the best British sporting artists born in the eighteenth century seemed, until quite recently, to have fallen into almost as deep oblivion as those of the great architects who built the Gothic cathedrals of France and England 600 years ago. We knew, it is true, at least the names of these painters. Their pictures are such faithful records of English life that the men themselves had become—as it were—absorbed into the wider background of national existence. By their works alone we knew them. But the researches and discoveries of Mr. Kendall and Mr. Sparrow are now helping us to know much more about their lives. And the more we find out, the more deeply we realise how well they knew their subjects—hunting, shooting, racing, fishing and the rest—at first hand, as few artists have ever known them ; and that is one reason why they have transmitted to us so much of that open-air happiness and zest which is their chief characteristic. It was not merely technical knowledge, but personal experience as well which enabled them to suggest to others the breezy, good-tempered, healthy atmosphere which a life of clean sport can inspire.

The book to which these pages serve as introduction is a good instance of the advance in knowledge I have mentioned. From Mr. Sparrow's chapters you will learn more of Alken and his family than has ever been brought together in one volume before. He could draw Hunting and write about it because he hunted himself, as Ferneley did, or Herring. Each artist has given us scenes from many a run which could only have been the records of personal impressions and experiences ; in some cases it is known that this was the fact, though Alken has fewer confessed portraits



than the rest. And remember that Ben Marshall, before them, had written as a regular contributor to a leading magazine on racing ; that Stubbs, earlier still, had spent months in dissecting the body of a horse under intolerable conditions, and has left us a book on anatomy which has never been surpassed. The subject need not be laboured ; but it offers at least one answer to the question why such men have had so few successors. Such a combination of artistic skill and passion for the hunting field as Loraine Smith exhibited must invariably be rare ; and the researches of Major Guy Paget have thrown a new light on this fine old artist's life and habits. But he was far from being alone. It will be the task of the authors of this and subsequent volumes in our series to prove that striking fact.

One valuable contribution to knowledge, at any rate, Mr. Shaw Sparrow makes. He shows by incontrovertible evidence, not merely artistic but documentary, the value of the true Henry Alken as opposed to the many fraudulent imitations of him which abounded during his lifetime and after it, a considerable number, alas ! emanating from his own family. If you want to see his best, look at Mr. Oswald Magniac's paintings (p. 46) which were the originals of the famous set of Leicestershire steeple-chase prints ; or at Sir Gilbert Greenall's wonderful pair (p. 25) entitled " Drawing the Cover " and " The Kill " ; or at the exquisitely tinted set (p. 40) of the match across country in the Oliver Behrens Collection. None of his copyists can come up to that. Consider, too, the sketches reproduced from the *Sporting Scrapbook* of his early days, and you will begin to realise how hard he worked and how carefully he trained himself before he won success. Like so many of his comrades, of course, he did too much. This single volume cannot pretend and does not claim to represent every kind of work he sold. But it does contain far more of that work, and of its best, than has ever been published in one book before. A great record it is, especially when we recall that he began as a miniature painter of languid ladies and ended as one of the greatest artists of speed in horse or hound who ever lived.



I wish it were possible to say more here of the men and animals Alken has immortalised. But space would fail me even to suggest that unplumbed ocean of social history and sporting development. I can only hint at the times in which he lived and looked about him for his subjects. It was a time far more full of colour, life and movement than our own, and the horse had a far greater share in it than he will ever have again. It was nearly the zenith of English hunting. His friend Charles James Apperley (better known as Nimrod) was born in 1778, the year of Chatham's death, and died in 1843 on the day when Cotherstone won the Derby, so that he knew "the Chase, the Turf, and the Road" at their best. He saw the last of Mr. Meynell and the first of Lord Sefton with the Quorn; he rode with the Duke of Beaufort's, with Sir Thomas Mostyn and the Bicester, with Lord Jersey and Sir Henry Peyton; he knew Mr. Corbet, of Sundorn, with his famous Trojan and that odd friend of his, Walter Stubbs, of Beckbury; Colonel Joliffe's hounds in Surrey, or Colonel Wyndham's in Sussex; Sir Arthur Chichester and Parson Russell in Devon; Mr. Villebois or Sir William Hoste in Hampshire; George Osbaldeston, Mr. Holyoake and Mr. Cradock in Leicestershire; Sir Bellingham Graham in Shropshire; the Raby Pack, the Bedale Club, the Badsworth under Lord Hawke, Lord Alvanley at Melton Mowbray—and many another brilliant company in that life of open air and sport.

That Henry Alken made a figure in it, too, may be seen from an article in *Blackwood's* in 1824 which tells us:—

"Alken first published anonymously, and people wondered very much who *Ben Tally Ho* could be. Some of the Meltonians suspected a celebrated surgeon, for they knew of no other London star that was a bold and knowing rider among them occasionally, and a perfect master in horseflesh and could at the same time be suspected of having anything to do with books and booksellers. But this laurel belonged not to his ample wreath. Their own familiar friend, the man with whom they had for years taken sweet counsel—I am half ashamed of his rashness—he blabbed it out one night to Sir Francis Burdett, who, when at Melton, is as good a Tory as ever was spoilt, and a half dozen more of *the set*. This print here (in *A Touch of the Fine Arts*, one of Alken's publications) represents the party an hour after the murder was out. That is the baronet balancing the empty punchbowl on



the back of his left hand. This one (Alken) on the floor is the culprit in his old jacket. He has not had time, you see, to dress for dinner. This is the "rum parson" with his foot in the other bowl. A spirited effect indeed, but little order kept in the grouping of the figures."

This description reminds me of the older "Foxhunters Regaling," by Luke Clennell; but I do not quote it with the object of suggesting that nobody could be in Nimrod's *set* without disappearing under the table after dinner. No doubt they drank. But they had hunted hard all day, and they were out with hounds next morning. Most of them held their liquor like gentlemen, and all but a very few kept fit and kept their weight down. It is not for us to throw stones at a conviviality which knew as little of cocktails as it did of jazzing. Their mail coaches drove from London to Edinburgh (400 miles) at eleven miles an hour, stoppages included; and even with our improved breed of coach horses and all our vaunted knowledge we could only get the hundred miles to Brighton and back at a fraction over twelve miles to the hour, with Jim Selby on the box. Nor are there many hounds nowadays who could beat Mr. Smith-Barry's Bluecap and Wanton, who finished out of sight of Mr. Meynell's couple, and did the Beacon Course at Newmarket (four and half miles) at a pace of over twenty-four miles to the hour. And I say this, although the old love of hound work (as opposed to careering at full pace across country, fox or no fox) has sadly disappeared of late in a hurrying generation which seems almost bent on reproducing the worst habits of those gay Meltonians at whom George Osbaldeston was always swearing, until he brought out a bitch pack too fast even for those young scatterbrains to over-ride.

But it will take more than this to kill foxhunting in England. William Bromley-Davenport (1821-1884), of Capesthorne, in Cheshire (also Eton and Christchurch), prognosticated its early demise. But it is not dead yet. This is what he wrote, in one of the cleverest parodies of his day on Tennyson:—

" Brother thrusters ! brother funkens, you may well look rather blue  
For the future that's impending is a queerish one for you



I have looked into its pages and I read the Book of fate  
And saw Foxhunting abolished by order from the State.  
Saw the heavens filled with guano, and the clouds at men's command  
Raining down unsavoury liquids for the benefit of the land ;  
Saw the airy navies earthward bear the planetary swell  
And the long-projected railroad made from Halifax to Hell ;  
Saw the landlords yield their acres after centuries of wrongs,  
Cotton lords turn country gentlemen in patriotic throngs ;  
Queen, religion, State abandoned and the flags of party furled  
In the Government of Cobden and the dotage of the world."

There were few better judges of sport than Willoughby de Broke, and he wrote of Bromley-Davenport that he would have seen the fairest times the nineteenth century could offer ; rural England as yet unscarred by railroads ; with enough of modern comforts to make life very pleasant. He would have seen the Golden Age of foxhunting, and would have left his successors to compete with a diminished rent roll, with agricultural depression, and " with the spirit of a philosophy whose manifestations have been the incitement to class hatred." Warburton and Whyte Melville were of that age ; Surtees and " The Druid " knew it. The best sport has always had good chronicles from " the Boke of St. Albans " onwards through Somervile to Beckford, Delmé Radcliffe, Cecil, Vyner, Carleton, Grantley Berkeley. What a list it is ! The names sound like the notes upon a horn across the winter fields.

I could have taken it back much further. But it is even more important to remember that it has gone on to the present day—through Pennel-Elmhirst and Charles Richardson, who were " Brooksby " and " Shotley " of the *Field* respectively ; and on to John Masefield and Will Ogilvie. Few poets of the chase have written better than this last :—

" Deep in our hearts enfolden  
For ever shall be found  
With dearest memories crowned  
Those glorious days and golden  
We spent with horse and hound.



Their greetings we recapture  
 Their voices yet we hear  
 Wind-borne and clarion-clear,  
 Those men who shared the rapture  
 Of many a bygone year."

It is because no writer, how marvellously soever he may write, can ever give us what the artist can bequeath, that I say every sportsman who owns a sporting library should add to it this book on Henry Alken, and the other books that are to follow on Stubbs and Ferneley and the rest. Even in 1840 Warburton had forebodings. Writing of a picture of the Cheshire Hunt by Calvert, he said :—

" Ere the time honoured race of our foxhunters end,  
 The poor no protector, the farmer no friend,  
 Let the pencil be dipt in the hues of the Chase  
 And contentment and health be portrayed in each face.  
 Let them say when this canvas the pastime recalls,  
 Such once were the gentry who dwelt in our Halls ;  
 Let them here view the face of an old Cheshire Squire  
 And regret the past sport that enliven'd our shire."

Well, it is not dead in Cheshire yet, nor in Warwickshire, nor in the Shires. Perhaps the one thing in the England of to-day that Henry Alken would recognise would be our English pastures when the pack has viewed their fox ; and because of this, Henry Alken still lives for us in drawings that he made a hundred years ago ; and the same spirit that filled his breezy canvases still animates the followers of every hunt in England.

" Though thorns be thick, though binders lace,  
 Though stout be stile and rail,  
 Though nought but blood can live the pace,  
 And nought but pluck prevail,  
 The call's to all, the field is fair  
 To every creed and class ;  
 So draw your girths, all ye who dare,  
 And ride the English grass ! "

*July, 1927.*

T. A. C.



## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

TO seek information about the Alken family is to grope, week after week, in a biographical labyrinth, dim in many parts and dark in many others. Points of light are visible here and there, coming from details of true information which have been collected gradually by researchers. The late Sir Walter Gilbey was the first pioneer in the labyrinth, and he and his assistants received help from two of Henry Alken's grandchildren, Mr. Charles Alken and Miss Eliza Lanham. Useful work was done, and later research has improved the sketch diligently made by Gilbey, more than twenty-five years ago. I have been able to form patches of mosaic with a small collection of new facts ; and Mr. George Kendall, after careful searching in Parish Records and in other papers, has added very valuable information about Henry Alken's parents and grandparents.

At first he and I were opposed in certain matters, but to-day, after much renewed study, we see eye to eye in all the main questions. A Sketch of Mr. Kendall's researches was published in *The Bookman's Journal and Print Collector*, July, 1923, where it attracted not half enough attention. Since then Mr. Kendall has developed his sketch, adding much new information, so that the Alken labyrinth has become more interesting, though not less intricate. The more we look into it, indeed, the more involved it appears to be.

So my aim in this monograph is to write an impartial account of all that is known, first about Henry Alken himself, and then about his ancestry and family. Henry and his genius will run through five chapters because they are the most important ; afterwards, in a final chapter, we can adventure into the labyrinth where the lesser Alkens have their hiding places and where we shall receive much help from Mr. Kendall. Among



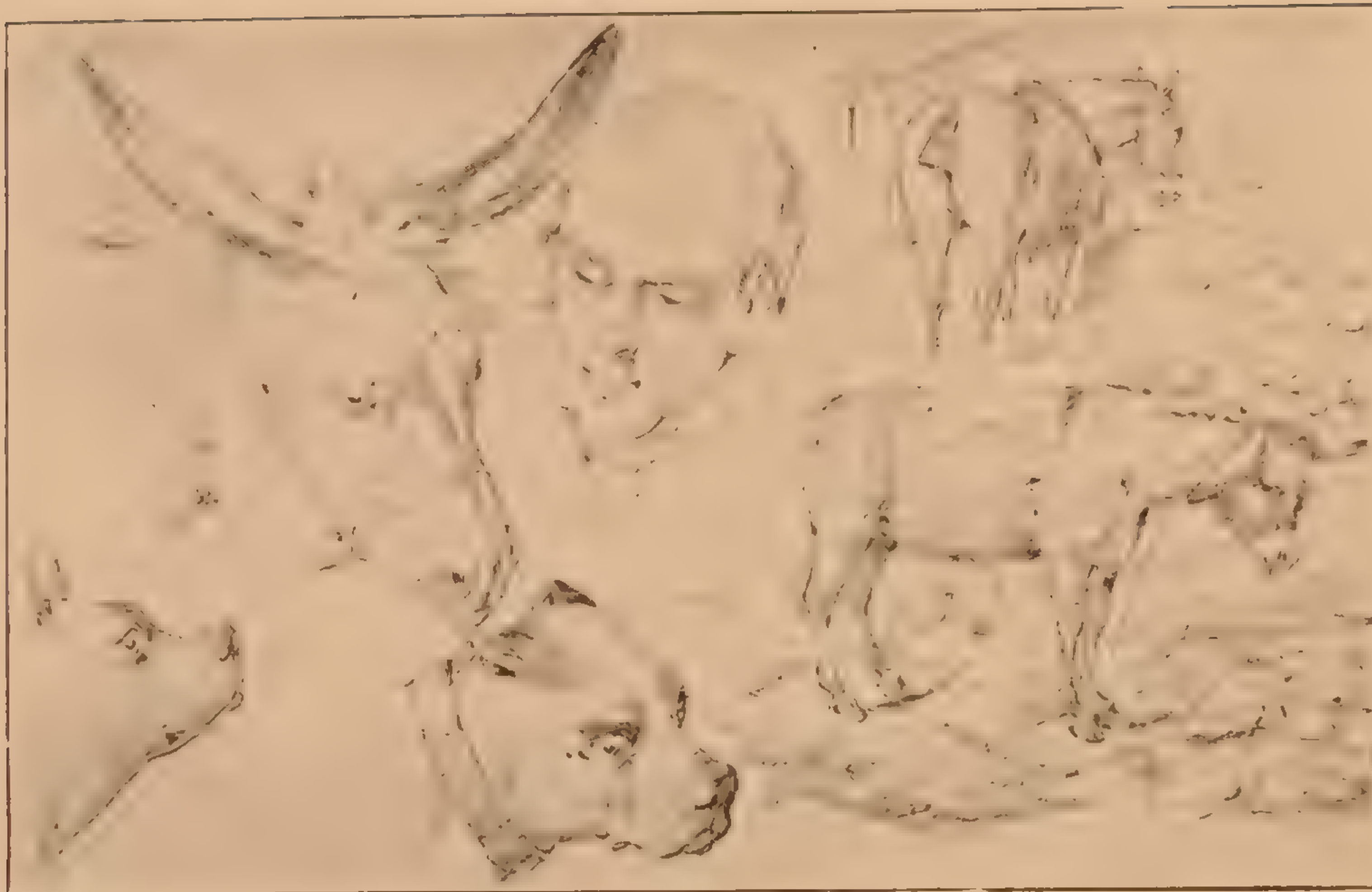
the lesser Alkens is Henry's grandfather, Seffrien Alken, a fine carver in wood and in stone, who did much work for a great architect, Sir William Chambers, by whom he was employed at Somerset House, at Marlborough House, and at Peper Harrow, in Surrey. With Mr. H. Avray Tipping's assistance, Mr. Kendall has done justice to Henry Alken's grandfather. Art ran in the Alken family through three generations, if not more, as we shall see ; and, further, I think it probable that Henry and his father, the elder Samuel Alken, had each a studio school where members of the family were employed, losing their identity as paid assistants.

W. S. S.

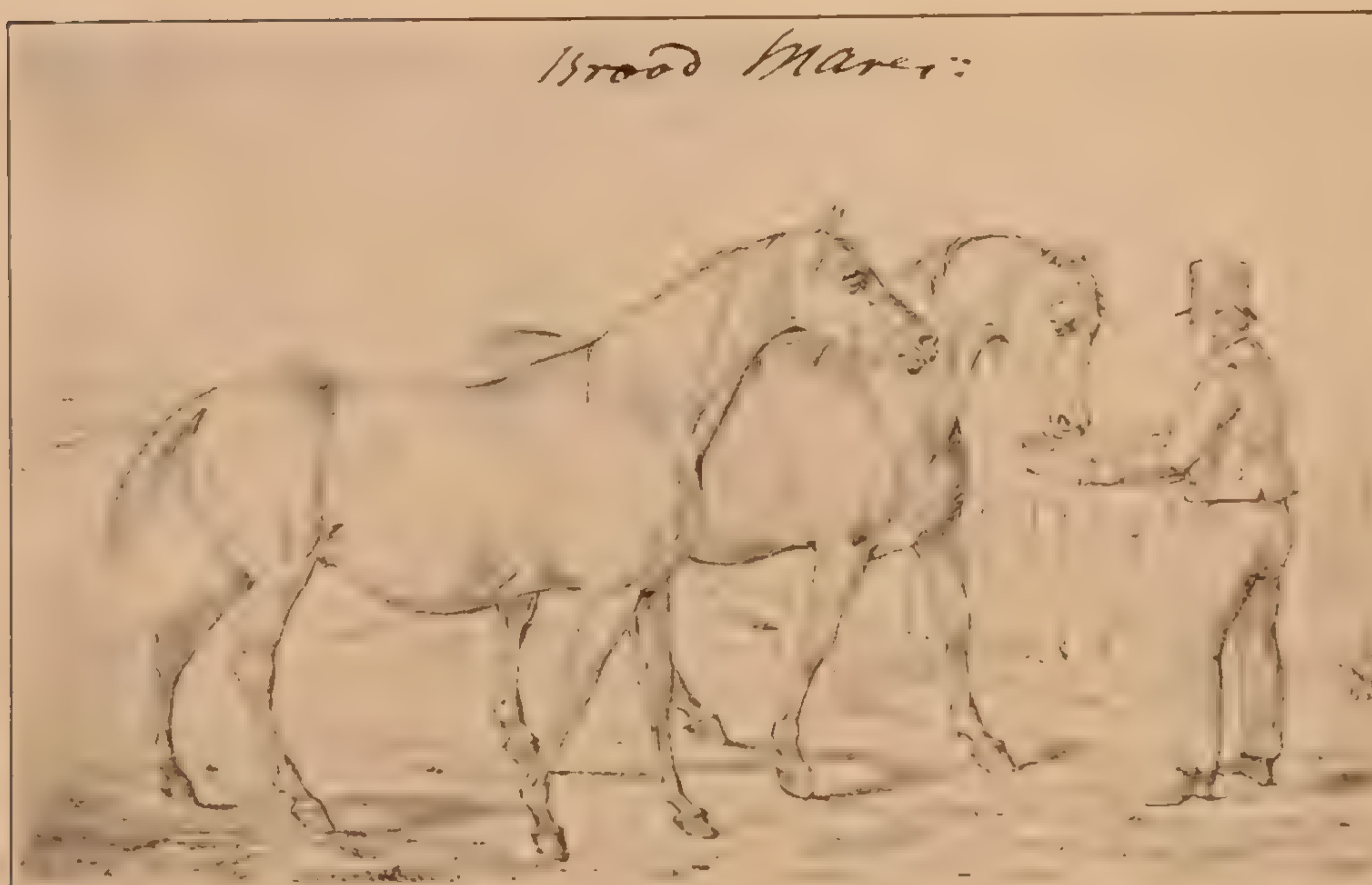








PAGE OF SKETCHES IN SOFT GROUND ETCHING.  
Henry Alken's "Sporting Scrap Book."



BROOD MARES.  
From Henry Alken's "Sporting Scrap Book," published by McLean in 1824.  
*The Oliver Behrens Collection.*



# THE GENIUS OF HENRY ALKEN

## CHAPTER ONE

### Henry Alken Himself

#### I

**H**E was born on October 12th, 1785, not in Suffolk, as Gilbey believed, but in a London house, as Mr. Kendall has found out ; a house that still exists, No. 3, Dufours Place, off Broad Street, Golden Square. In Chapter Six we shall return to this birthplace. Henry was christened Henry Thomas, but he never used his second Christian name. This fact we have many reasons to deplore, because Henry's eldest son, following his father's example, dropped one of his Christian names, causing no end of trouble in picture markets, public and private. His baptismal name was Samuel Henry, but he became known to his family as Henry Gordon, and work by this man, signed H. Alken only, is offered and sold frequently as the great Henry's.

Henry's first lessons in drawing came from his father, Samuel Alken, senior, a professional artist ; but at an early age he was put under J. T. Barber, a celebrated miniature painter, who taught him how to build a head firmly as well as delicately, and " to square his touch " in the French manner. For youngsters in art are generally much too fond of curves, they draw " too round," looking for prettiness instead of character.

Henry exhibited only twice at the Royal Academy, and his contributions were miniature portraits of ladies, Miss Gubbins and Miss Jackson, painted in 1801 and 1802, his sixteenth and seventeenth years.

In some pages of Henry's early sketches and soft-ground etching we are able to see clearly what he learnt from J. T. Barber. Four examples



are reproduced in this chapter. The miniature style is active variously in page after page of his sketchbook, but the most notable drawing lesson is the bald and elderly man with a legal face, clear-cut and meditative, ably sketched among five other studies—a horse in his stable foreshortened, the heads of two bull-terriers, a donkey's head, and a donkey out of doors, in sunlight, yet throwing only a little touch of shadow on the ground. Henry had never any liking for cast shadows, somehow, as we shall see.

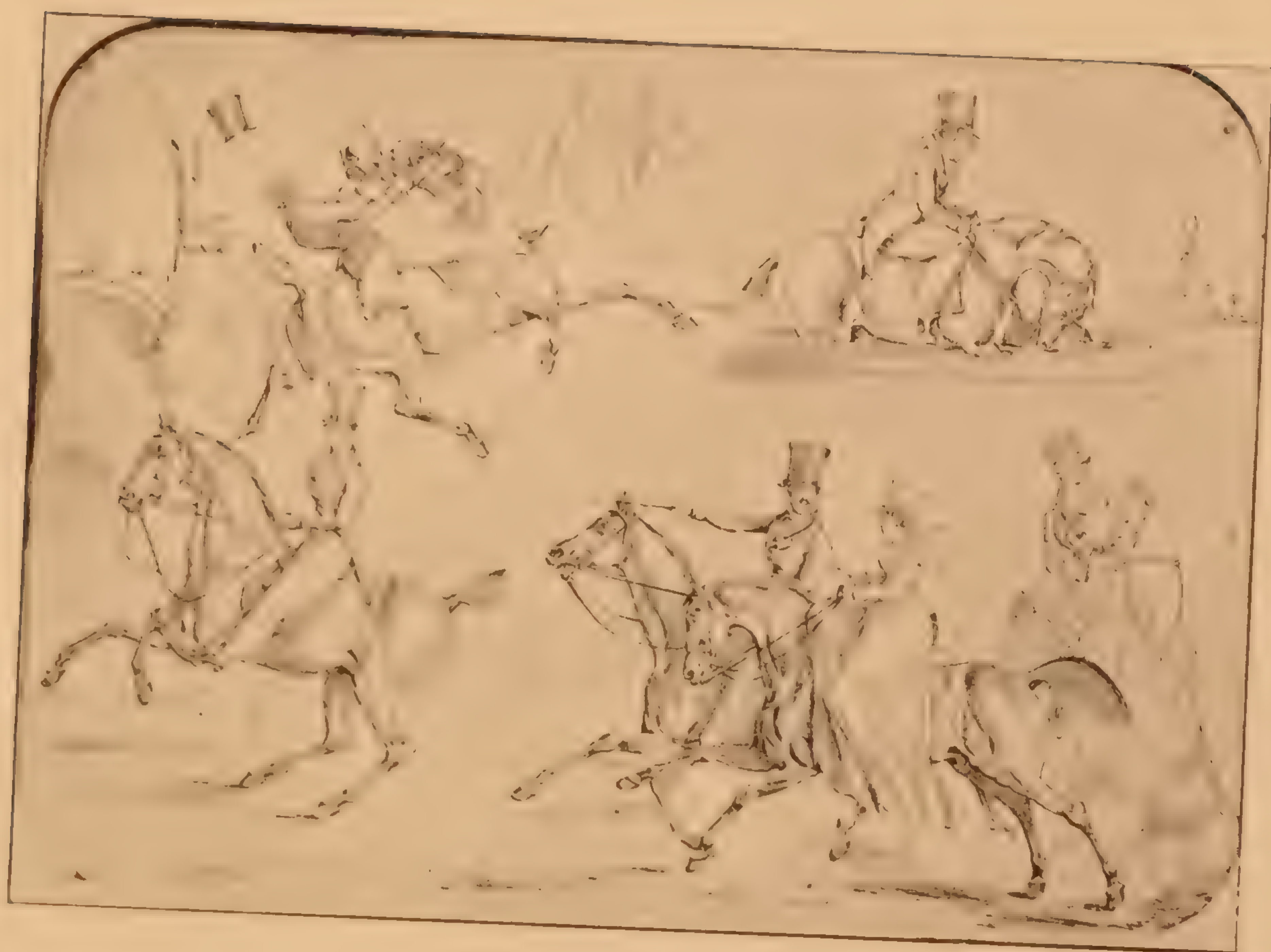
These animal studies are clever, but not wonderfully able, like the earliest enterprise both of Edwin Landseer and of Brian Hatton. The donkey in the open air is good, a charming miniature ; and I am glad to know that Henry's liking for animals was encouraged by J. T. Barber. In his early studies of sporting dogs the eyes are often too prominent, but their expressions are canine, while Landseer at an early age began to toy with human passions put into the eyes and characters of dogs. Henry Alken never had any wish to be a new Æsop.

As a rule his horses are better than his dogs ; we see this fact illustrated even during his best period ; and its beginning is in these pages from sketchbooks, which come to us from different early dates. The horses are all good, though some are outlined less emotionally than others and look too cut-out, unlike the motherly Brood Mares. There is a humorous and a peppery-tempered miniature, the horse that has " No fancy for a Waggon " ; and note also the prairie horses that run wild ; they have more devil in them than you will find in Sawrey Gilpin, and they preceded by a generation, or thereabouts, Woodward's picture of " Mazeppa," that made a great hit at the R.A. in 1828.

Let us see how he stood during his first period (*a*) towards the older school of sporting artists ; (*b*) towards its successor ; and (*c*) towards a newer movement, which he himself in a few years would lead, with so much originality that his methods would be seldom affected by other work.

In the year of Henry's birth the great George Stubbs was sixty-one,





STUDIES IN HORSEMANSHIP.  
From Henry Alken's "Moments of Fancy," published by McLean, 1823.



STUDIES OF HORSES AND A TURK.  
From Henry Alken's "Sporting Scrap Book," 1824. *The Oliver Behrens Collection.*







and he and the R.A. were quarrelling because he declined, as an Elected Academician, to present a diploma picture to the President and Council. Twenty years earlier old John Wootton had died, after connecting the style of the first English sporting artist, Francis Barlow, with a later mode of slow and ceremonious hunting. Stubbs represents historically the commencement of a new outlook, and Wootton the end of what may be called the classic manner. He formed his style on foreign models, while Stubbs was thoroughly English, like Hogarth. Into the rival enthusiasms of these two artists and their adherents, four daring innovators were born, all in the 1750's—Gillray and Bunbury, Rowlandson and Howitt. Morland's birth was in 1763, Ben Marshall's in 1767, and James Ward's in 1769. Ferneley was four years older than Henry Alken, and James Barenger five. Abraham Cooper was two years younger; and as for Philip Reinagle (*b.* 1749), and Sawrey Gilpin (*b.* 1733), and the elder Dean Wolstenholme (*b.* 1757), their "between" manners connected Wootton and Stubbs with the revolutionary freedom that Rowlandson and Morland brought to No. 3, Dufours Place, when Henry Alken's father engraved after their drawings.

Yet Henry's earliest work was miniature painting for boudoirs; and what is more notable by far, he remained throughout life a miniaturist, so that we have incessant contrasts between two qualities that are generally antagonistic—a tender delicacy of touch, with a lingering enjoyment of detail, and a growing passion for ardent speed. To appreciate Henry's best work we must love this invariable contrast between a hand that caresses what it draws, and an emotion expressed in h.p. speed that contradicts the manipulation.

Nothing could be more remarkable than a contrast expressing pace in ardent feeling and rest in fondling handicraft; for in graphic and pictorial art, as in music, we expect that when emotion moves from pianissimo into crescendo and on into fortissimo, the handicraft will be in unison with the developing motive power. When a horse moves at full gallop Henry will turn the rider's face towards us and will draw it carefully enough to be a miniature portrait. An example is given later in colour,



from the Oliver Behrens collection. It represents a horseman who looks like an artist, perhaps Alken himself as "Ben Tally Ho." In his varied realisations of speed, again, Henry Alken preceded, and exceeded, that great effort made by J. M. W. Turner in the picture called "Rain, Steam and Speed—the Great Western Railway in 1844."

Henry's health and genius in 1844 were going downhill; and we must note two things more in the artistic history of h.p. speed. First, H.A. was busy, as Ben Tally Ho, in his study of rapid pace, more than eighteen years before E. W. Cooke, in 1829, etched a pioneer steam tug having a very long funnel, and very weak h.p. Next, if you turn to Nimrod's *Hunting Reminiscences* you will find that he feared that railways and steeplechasing would put an end to his favourite sport, fox-hunting. It follows, then, that Henry's passion for intensive pace in horses and hounds moved through a very important span of time in English history, sporting and industrial. It culminated in the 1830's, yet critics have not yet reviewed it at all fully.

Tradition says that fast riding to hounds, and its consequence fast hunting, came into art from examples of rapid horsemanship introduced by William Childe, "the Flying Childe" (1756–1824), during the 1780's. If this tradition is true, we owe a very great deal to Childe's innovations, which his friend, Hugo Meynell, opposed, but vainly. But it is not wholly true. Childe had a forerunner, James Seymour, who died in 1752, at the age of fifty, and whose fondness for art was exceeded by his passion for sport, that ran through a fortune, making him dependent on his brushes and colours. Two prints after James Seymour are particularly memorable. One represents a genuine flying leap on a grey hunter over a five-bar gate; and in the other a bay hunter takes such a soaring leap over a rivulet that he and his rider are silhouetted against a cloudy sky. In the first print, published by Carrington Bowles, there are three greyhounds; so I think it likely that the speed and spring of greyhounds may have been Seymour's inspiration. The handsome, cavalier-like figure on the grey hunter may be Seymour himself; painters often work from a mirror, and Seymour





Period, the 1820's. Perhaps a portrait—in a miniature-like style—of H. Alken himself as "Ben Tally Ho!"  
*The Oliver Behrens Collection.*







was a sort of Mytton, noted for original pluck. He ventured even to hold his own in a hot, but funny, quarrel with a very formidable old aristocrat, Charles, Duke of Somerset. The other hunter and his rider in Seymour's work were useful, I believe, to Loraine Smith when he illustrated one of Dick Knight's exploits: "By Jove! Those damn'd Quornites shall now see the trick!"

When Seymour anticipated William Childe, stately riding and the standing jump were in vogue. Hunting seemed like a fine ceremony in good courtiership. There was much display in luxurious costumes, and English fields were neither so well drained nor so hedged and fenced as they became later in the eighteenth century. Even then they did not permit Childe and his devotees to go such a slapping pace as Quornites would enjoy when Alken was in his thirties and forties. Thanks to Seymour and Henry Alken, swift and venturous hunting developed more rapidly in prints and pictures than it did over the gradually changing surfaces of hunting countries. The Sartoriuses and the Wolstenholmes keep us in touch with hunting traditions that Hugo Meynell inherited and improved, while Alken and his disciples and imitators—E. Gill of Northampton, W. P. Hodges of Dorset, Sir John Dean Paul, James Pollard, Sir Robert Frankland, Bart., and some others, such as Loraine Smith—belong to the new tradition brought into art by Seymour. It was in Shropshire that Childe began his own fast riding, and he alarmed the natives by hunting at a gallop down the steep sides of Clee Hills, caring not a jot for loose stones and granite boulders.

It is very interesting to remember, in this connection, that one of Alken's most famous adventures in speed dates from the beginning of his decline, 1839, and is expressed in four episodes of a steeplechase by moonlight, which were engraved by J. Harris for Rudolph Ackermann.

Less than a year ago the four original water-colour drawings of this steeplechase were recovered, after being hidden in private collections for eighty-seven years. Originally they were sold to one of Henry Alken's



patrons, Mr. Lister-Kaye, who passed them on to his son, Mr. E. C. Lister-Kaye, of Godmersham Park, Kent, who bequeathed them to Mr. Edward Hardy. From Mr. Hardy they passed to Messrs. Spink & Son, Ltd., and now they belong to an American collector, Mr. Willard S. Martin.

Each of these very typical drawings measures  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by  $14\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, a wee bit less than Harris's engravings.

Note their conception and the skilled energy of their handling. These water-colours were done from first to last with sincere fervour, after Alken had decided upon his effects. There is no fumbling, no washing-out with a damp sponge. Every drawing has the first-hand animation that convinces, and the technical expression in water-colours responds very well to the peculiar difficulties enforced upon it by moonlight in the country.

I examined a drawing removed from its frame, a frame bearing Ackermann's label. It was stuck down at its corners on an aged white mount. Lifting a corner freed from the paste I looked behind a piece of cardboard, not thick, nor thin enough to "cockle" when fastened to a drawing-board and moistened with water-colour. Over the face of this cardboard Alken floated a neutral tint that would aid him to get undertones for his moonlight episodes. When this ground was dry he either sketched or traced each composition with pencil, and then began to paint, with transparent tints sometimes, and sometimes with body-colour, as in the white nightcaps and quaint night-shirts, the moon and the moonlit clouds, the dappled grey horse, and some reflected lights here and there. The general effect is very akin to that of gouache drawings, and therefore in marked contrast to Alken's pure transparent water-colours. New difficulties demanded novelty of technical expression. If he achieved his results without help from preliminary studies he was a much more remarkable man than his most ardent admirers have believed. A feeling for decorative appeal certainly enables him to put in some moonlight where none could reach ; but in this matter as in others his drawings are far and



away better than the prints elaborately tinted by Ackermann's print-painters.

On my table is a first edition set of tinted prints of Harris's plates, which Mr. Fores has lent me, so I am able to compare the compositions with photographs of Alken's original drawings. With another set of prints—later impressions from the original copper plates published from Oxford by Ben Brooks—I have compared the original drawings.

The tinting in both sets of prints falsifies with too much coloured detail, but if we could find an untinted set I am sure we should be struck by Harris's integrity. Experimental proofs submitted to Alken would suggest some change, and now and then Alken would see how a drawing could be improved before he sold the set. In Plate I., for example, Alken added to this drawing a chimney, to make five in all ; and in the middle distance of Plate III., on our left hand, the engraving has in line six leafless and pollarded trees, grouped two by two ; so Alken added a seventh tree to his drawing, an uneven number making the line of tree-stems less conspicuous. But he over-passed a big mistake in the same drawing and its print. A horse crashes right through a five-bar gate, yet the broken gate throws an unbroken shadow, while the horse casts no shadow at all ! Harris liked this episode, for he put in an extra piece of flying timber and made the gate's shadow more noticeable. Artists never know how or why they fail to see such blunders.

Plate I. and the drawing tally precisely in composition, except that the print needs mystery. This applies also to Plate II. and its original. As regards the fourth plate and its drawing, they are sufficiently alike for the print to be called a good translation into aquatint, though the faked lighting in the water-colour is made more assertive by the tinted engravings. Moonshine over the houses could not reach either the two leading riders or the fifth one in the rear ; but decorative effect can be accepted easily as a freakish thing in a steeplechase by moonshine.

As a steeplechase by moonlight was quite new in art, Henry Alken may have made several sets of drawings for his clients. If another set



of drawings by Henry Alken exists, this monograph and its illustrations should discover it ; but the present set, here reproduced, is all that Harris and the print-tinters required.

If this moonlight race be not a myth, if it really did occur at Ipswich, then Henry Alken was the very artist who should have been familiar with its adventures, for he married an Ipswich lady, just six years after the race alarmed the village of Nacton.

The marriage register of St. Clement's Church, Ipswich, shows that Henry Alken, on October 14th, 1809, married Maria Gordon, and that both belonged to the parish of St. Clement's. Next year, on August 22nd, their eldest son was baptised in the same church. I do not know what Henry Alken's movements were between his pupilage with Barber, the miniature painter, in 1802, and his marriage at Ipswich ; but soon after his marriage he began to move rapidly on his way to success as a graphic journalist devoted to sport.

It is thought that he worked anonymously, under the pseudonym " Ben Tally Ho " till 1816 ; so he did usually, but not invariably, if we can rely on publishers' dates. As Mr. Kendall has pointed out, there is a good set of four shooting plates engraved after Henry Alken by Reeve, and published in 1813, May 1st, by S. and J. Fuller, Temple of Fancy, 34, Rathbone Place ; and another set of four shooting prints—engraved by Sutherland and published on March 22nd, 1813, by Harwood & Co., No. 30, Hunter Street, Brunswick Square—bears the full name of Henry Alken. Nevertheless, it was as Ben Tally Ho that he made the first real hits, causing no end of interest among sportsmen and the general public.



# STEEPLECHASING BY MOONLIGHT.



PLATE I.—"THE NIGHT RIDERS OF NACTON" PREPARING TO START.

"In the centre stood the grey Champion, ridden by the challenger, armed *cap-à-pie* in strict accordance with the prescribed array of 'Night-Shirt Overall'; his servant taking up another link in the curb-chain; whilst the Major, standing beside his black 'Old Trooper,' returned him full rations of his raillery. Lieutenant Lounger's nag appeared to be gazing in wonder at the many shadows thrown by the grass-blades waving in the moonlight; and in an opposite direction, the white top-knot of young Subden's night-cap might just be seen, peeping above his saddle bow, as with one foot already in the stirrup he stood prepared to mount. Captains Cannonball and Simpson, together with two other right good men and true, make up a complement of eight, and a strong body of the troopers, gathered in the background, completed a most novel and amusing scene, well worthy of record in the pictorial annals of the chase."—*Vide The Sporting Review*, No. 1, January, 1839.

'Tradition says that this Moonlight Race was run one December night in the year 1803, from the Cavalry Barracks at Ipswich, to Nacton Churchyard, a distance of four-and-a-half miles. Query: Is young Subden trying to mount with the wrong foot in the stirrup?—*The Willard S. Martin Collection*.







THE NIGHT RIDERS OF NACTON.



PLATE II.—WHOOOP ! AND AWAY ! THE LARGE FIELD NEAR BILES'S CORNER.

"Subden was here the first over the fence, a sturdy wattle, with a double fosse ; but his lot was not cast with a 'white' bean, for horse and rider turned a summerset together and rolled incontinently into one dirty ditch : whilst Major Medley stood upon the fence and flung his shirt-tail to the wind, as he tugged at the 'Old Trooper,' who was stuck fast in the other [ditch]—Lounge was the first safely landed. Next to him, Hansum on 'The Grey,' then Cannonball on a hot bay whose head and tail were always stuck up high in mid-air, and lastly, Simpson and two others, who still lived on in this most goodly company." See *The Sporting Review*, January, 1839.







A MIDNIGHT STEEPLECHASE.



PLATE III.—THE LAST FIELD NEAR NACTON HEATH.

" Cannonball, on his ' gunpowder ' horse, challenging the champion to a struggle for the lead. They charged the last fence together ; and while the ' Great Gun ' jumped smash through the middle of the gate, the grey, still hand in hand, stepped neatly over the strong hurdle fence and bank, by a jump on and off. Subden came third, then Lounger's horse, kicking his heels up at his master and careless of his woeful cries. Simpson was making a good line of his own across the field ; and two, dismounted in the distance, were exercising alike their patience, ingenuity, and powers of persuasion in the subjection of their refractory steeds."—*I'ide The Sporting Review*, No. 1, January, 1839.—*The Willard S. Martin Collection*.







A MIDNIGHT STEEPLECHASE.



PLATE IV.—THE FINISH. NACTON CHURCH AND VILLAGE.

"To Nacton Church five of them came. . . . Yah! Yah! Yah! screaming and whooping like devil-rid maniacs they clattered through the quiet village. Cannonball first, Lounger next. On one side of him Simpson, on the other Hansum and The Grey, who still proved himself at the top of the tree in timber-leaping, by taking a fallen elm in his stride. Subden brought up the rear with shrill and echoing shrieks which brought the villagers affrighted from their beds. . . ."—See *The Sporting Review*, January, 1839.







## CHAPTER TWO

### Henry Alken Himself (*continued*)

IT was in 1824 that a very important writer, Christopher North, in an article for *Blackwood's Magazine*, tried to weigh and measure Henry Alken, describing him as "the Apelles of Tom and Jerry," and saying that he shone at his best where Cruikshank failed. "He is a gentleman, he has lived with gentlemen, he understands their nature, both in its strength and in its weakness ; and he can delineate anything that he understands. It is he that can escort you to Melton and show you the feats in the field of those who are destined hereafter to shake the arsenal. . . . He feels the line that separates the true old *domini terrarum* from your *nouveau riche*. . . . He feels this and he paints as he feels. He is to Cruikshank what Scott is to Hogg—rather let me say, what Fielding is to Defoe. He not only can do what Cruikshank cannot, but he can also do almost anything that Cruikshank can. . . ."

One is glad that Christopher North wrote about Alken, but—was he Henry's biographer? No, unfortunately. And in this he resembled Nimrod, and the Druid, and the sporting magazines. Research has not yet found any person who thought it worth while to collect biography from Henry Alken. Yet a miniaturist who rapidly became far-famed in hunting prints, first as Ben Tally Ho, should have been of biographical interest to North, and to all sportsmen who wrote ; and there is one story in North's article which should have caused him to look for others. Meltonians had no inkling at first that their occasional crack, Henry Alken, was Ben Tally Ho also. Some of them suspected that Ben was a celebrated surgeon from London, a bold and knowing horseman who rode with them occasionally, and seemed to have pluck enough to unite surgery, hunting and art to adventures with books and booksellers. Perhaps Alken's vanity was hurt



by the surgeon's reputation. At all events, he tired of his incognito, and amazed a party of Meltonians :

" Their own familiar friend, the man with whom they had for years taken sweet counsel—I am half-ashamed of his rashness—he blabbed it out one night to Sir Francis Burdett . . . and a half-dozen more of The Set. This Print here, in a *A Touch of the Fine Arts*, represents the party an hour after the murder was out. That is the baronet balancing the empty punch-bowl on the back of his left hand. This one, on the floor, is the culprit in his red jacket. He has not had time, you see, to dress for dinner. That is the ' rum parson ' with his foot in the other bowl. A spirited effect indeed, but little order kept in the grouping of the figures."

Several points in this tale should be underlined, so let me speak of them one by one.

1. *A Touch of the Fine Arts* was brought out by H. A. in 1824, twelve soft-ground etchings with descriptions, price a guinea. Eight years earlier, at the age of thirty-one, he wrote and illustrated a book—*Beauties and Defects in the Figure of the Horse*—containing the first known plates that appeared under his own name. Either then or a little earlier, he admitted himself to be Ben Tally Ho, and was put down at Melton by cups of congratulation.

2. Was he often too convivial ? Or was he like " the Flying Childe," who, as Nimrod relates, out-manceuvred the vogue of too much drink by pouring most of his wine into a tub that was put secretly under the table by his side at hunt dinners, so that he remained cool while his comrades became so excited that they did not see what he was doing ?

3. I ask these questions because H. A., who was very strong and energetic through more than thirty years, drifted into bad health, then into consumption, and died so poor in his sixty-sixth year that he left no money. His funeral expenses were paid by one of his three daughters, Lydia, who had married John C. Zeitter, animal painter and engraver. I don't suggest that he was ever like Morland ; the general character of his work is too firmly and delicately handled to come from habitual intemperance ; but his fine health did break, and the question *why*



suggests itself at once. That he should be tipsy when we get a vivid picture of him after dinner is enough to remind us that toasting and tipsiness were fashions, and that few artists have been able to stand much wine. Even George Stubbs, known as a Hercules, became a water-drinker in middle life because wine disagreed with his work.

4. But the main point is that Henry Alken, after a rise uncommonly successful, suffered a very deplorable decline and fall. Unite this fact to another, the variety of his energetic and humorous moods in many hundreds of prints, drawings and pictures. The prints in his hunting sets alone—the best either etched or engraved by himself, the others by men carefully chosen—are believed to number more than 300 motifs or subjects. (I have not counted them myself because I prefer to pick and choose.) Let us think of his life as the Grand Leicestershire Steeple Chase of sporting art, run throughout with steady courage, full of stirring episodes which were not recorded, with an end so forlorn that we cannot think of it as we do of old Tom Moody's burial—as in keeping with a sporting career.

A piece of information in the second number of the *Sporting Review*, May, 1839, enables me to assume that Alken's decline began at the end of the 1830's. Then it was that he began to send in drawings at a venture to editors. He offered one to the *Sporting Review*, and the editor, Craven, wrote about it in a snobbish tone :—

“ This picture, among many others for election, had been placed upon my table. Chance let one of the best amateur sporting artists of the day into my study, and Alken's sketch catching his eye, he at once gave signal of a find. We heard him throw tongue—and he is no babbler. ‘ That's good ! That's correct ! Put that in your book ! No foxhunter will find matter to cavil at there ! ’ We were of the same opinion, and are not without hope that many will pronounce well of our taste and judgment.”

To write in this way about the most remarkable sporting artist of his time is proof enough that Alken had begun to go downhill. Often in his last phase he trudged from Kentish Town and Highgate to his two friends, Arthur B. Fores and George P. B. Fores, printsellers and publishers,



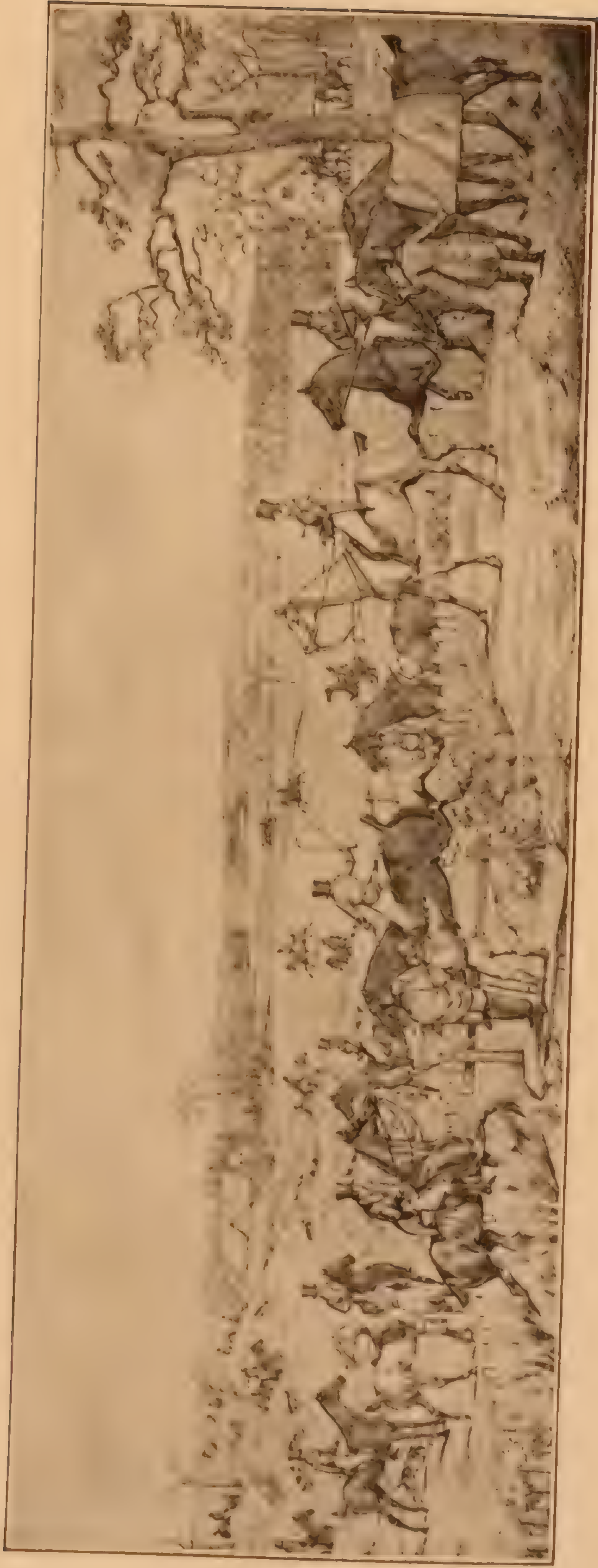
carrying always a small portfolio of sketches, and showing at all times much eagerness to strike a bargain. A great deal of the work that he produced in his period of downgoing has caused, and will continue to cause, many disputes, for it resembles the stuff turned out by copyists and imitators.

What did Henry Alken look like during his decline? He became quaintly countrified, oddly old-fashioned. In those days when he was called *Old Alken* such a portrait of him was drawn in words by "Wildrake," George Tattersall, and published in *The New Sporting Magazine*, 1844. Old Henry's hat was ugly, low-crowned and broad-brimmed; his frock of Kendal green was dotted with large gilt buttons; and his gaiters and kickseys of brown cloth were in accord with a rustic waistcoat cut low, having ample pockets out of date, but convenient for carrying sketch-books. His shoes were thick and solid, and he preferred a walking-staff to a walking-stick. If Old Alken and old J. M. W. Turner—they died in the same year, 1851—had ever dared to stand side by side at Tattersall's, they would have been like Shetland ponies among race-horses, and Turner, a miracle of thrift in finance, might have risen to a guinea as an opening bid.

There are two vivid sketches more of Henry's decline. One of them came to Gilbey from two of H. A.'s grandchildren; it sums him up as stern to his children, proud and aloof to callers, intolerant towards exhibitions and private patrons, but friendly to dealers and publishers. One private patron Henry certainly kept and loved, Mr. Hollingworth Magniac, of Colworth, Bedfordshire, Master of the Oakley from 1841 to 1847, and grandfather of Major Oswald Magniac, whose fine collection is well known to readers of the *Field*, and who takes as keen an interest in Henry the Great's best work as do Mr. Oliver Behrens, Sir Gilbert and Lady Greenall,\* General Cowie, Mr. Guy Gilbey, and Mr. Schwerdt. It was Mr. Hollingworth Magniac who commissioned Henry's finest hunting picture in oils, "The Oakley Hunt," and also the famous set of eight small paintings of the Grand Leicestershire Steeple Chase, run on March 12th, 1829. Henry visited Colworth several times, and after his health broke he

\* To-day, Baron and Lady Daresbury of Walton.





DRAWING THE COVER.  
*From the original water-colour by H. Alken, in the collection of Major Oswald Magniac.*



GONE AWAY!  
*From the original water-colour by H. Alken, in the collection of Major Oswald Magniac.*









OVER THE WATER.  
*From the original water-colour by H. Alken, in the collection of Major Oswald Magniac.*



THE DEATH.  
*From the original water-colour by H. Alken, in the collection of Major Oswald Magniac.*







remained there, off and on, for two years, Mr. Magniac doing far and away more for him than C. Loraine Smith had done for Morland.

A letter written by Henry on April 2nd, 1839, and quoted by Gilbey, helps to mark his last phase. It was posted from Kentish Town to an old aunt at Childrey, Berks., named Mrs. Woodley. One paragraph reveals a disappointed man whose pride is embittered and up in arms :

“ All I can say about myself is that I keep grinding on in this world with but little change except that I grow older every day (work) and none the forwarder ; but, I thank God and my own exertions, I go on without having to ask favour of any person or accepting it when offered, for I do not choose to be a slave to anyone however high his rank.”

There is vinegar in this rebellious pride. Compare it with H. A.'s witty and high-hearted early manhood, when he rode with hounds as One of the Right Sort, fought a duel in sporting prints with Sir Robert Frankland, Bart., and wrote his illustrated book on *The Beauties and Defects in the Figure of the Horse*. To decline into a soured temper was too easy to be good sport ; and to accept patronage from the well-to-do, during bad times and good, has never been slavery to genuine artists, as pot-boiling for retail markets has never failed to be. A great deal of rubbish has to be cleared away from Henry's output before his genius can be appraised fairly ; and though he “ did not choose to be a slave to anyone however high his rank,” he was frequently a slave to the retail trade, as in his illustrations to *Don Quixote*, which were etched by John Zeitter.

It was in the year of Waterloo that Alken, working as Ben Tally Ho, and “ an occasional visitor in Leicestershire,” answered a challenge which another occasional Meltonian, Sir Robert Frankland, had offered him publicly in June, 1811. Sir Robert's plates, six in number, were coloured etchings with wide margins, signed R. F. *inv't. et fecit*. Now and then they appear in the market bound in their original wrappers, and having the rare title page, with its verse and explanatory text, signed “ Billesdon Coplow,” Sir Robert's disguise. The six plates represent the *Indispensable Accomplishments* of fine hunting in Leicestershire : “ Going along at a



Slapping Pace," " Topping a Flight of Rails and coming well into the next Field," " Charging an Ox Fence," " Going in and out clever," " Facing a Brook," and " Swishing at a Rasper." And we are told that " the Meltonians hold every horse cheap which cannot do these things properly." Leicestershire alone, it is added, knows what a first-rate hunter should be and should do. " In vulgar countries (*i.e.*, all others), where these accomplishments are not indispensable, he may be a hunter." Moreover

" Every species of ground ev'ry horse does not suit,  
What's a good country Hunter may here prove a brute,  
And unless for all sorts of strange fences prepared,  
A man and his horse are sure to be scared."

Sir Robert Frankland was an amateur artist, like J. D. Paul, C. Loraine Smith, Wildrake (George Tattersall), and W. P. Hodges ; and his Meltonian plates were good enough to draw much attention away from young Ben Tally Ho. That they were liked very much is proved by several references to them in Nimrod's *Hunting Reminiscences*, Chapters I. and II. Nimrod doesn't speak of Frankland by name, but says in Chapter I. that the figure delineated in the Leicestershire plates, as " Going in and out clever," was intended for Sir Watkin Williams Wynn (the Sir Watkin of 1811 and earlier), and that " it is an excellent representation of his person and seat." Next in Chapter II., I learn that the horseman in " Going along at a Slapping Pace," is " Mr. Lindow on the Clipper."

Ben Tally Ho's countermove in seven prints, young in style, is witty and high-spirited, but portraits of noted men are not given because Alken is dealing with *Qualified Horses and Unqualified Riders*, not with cracks such as Lindow. His sub-title runs : *Or the Reverse of Sporting Phrases taken from the Work entitled* INDISPENSABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS. Then comes a verse :

" Every species of rider every horse does not suit,  
What's a good London Rider may here prove a Brute,  
For he must face danger without losing breath,  
Or give up all hope of enjoying the Death ;  
A death he may meet with ere he returns home,  
And he stands a good chance of its being his own ! "



Refreshed by his gallop into anapæstic verse, Ben Tally Ho lauds his challenger's work as "very amusing," and adds: "I was very much delighted" with it, "but could not forbear remarking that" its author "considered it only necessary that the Horse should be well qualified to 'go along a Slapping Pace,' " etc. "He does not mention that to do All That Kind of Thing it is necessary that he [*i.e.*, the horse] should be mounted by a Rider of Judgment and Courage." So Alken thinks it worth while "to mount well qualified Horses with unqualified Riders, and to show the figure those Horses are likely to cut during the day."

This duel in hunting prints, the only one at present known to me, has been overlooked by sporting writers, a regrettable fact, as Alken continued to be influenced by it and in varying moods. It freed him from his first style and enabled him to concentrate his attention on three things: humour in hunting prints for occasional use; fast riding to hounds with as much variety in it as he could observe and also imagine; straight and fast leaping and its drama of accidents, such as we find in two very gifted drawings from the Behrens collection, "Charging a Stile and a Ditched Fence," and "Taking a Toss with a Variety of Effects."

It is not overmuch to say that Frankland's challenge turned "Ben Tally Ho!" into Henry Alken, the most confident and enterprising sporting journalist that English Art had put into drawings, prints, water-colours and oils.

Alken and his rival probably met in the field, and Sir Robert was twenty-seven when he published *Indispensable Accomplishments*. He drew caricatures of sportsmen, published a set of shooting scenes, also a set of humorous fishing prints beautifully aquatinted by Charles Turner, and if he had devoted himself to art professionally, there would have been incessant rivalry between him and Alken, for their gifts were similar. But Sir Robert turned from art and sport to public work, and died without male issue in 1849, two years before Alken.

In 1817, through S. and J. Fuller, Alken published a set of seven tinted plates that belonged to the same mood as his countermove to



Frankland's challenge, choosing for his title *Sporting Discoveries, or The Miseries of Hunting*.<sup>\*</sup> A year later he issued *Doings*, six hunting prints : "Doing the Down Leap," "The Down Leap Done," "Doing it Furiously," "Doing the 'Thing Well—giving Dribblers the Go By," "Doing it Somehow," and "Doing it No How."† His entertaining prints called "Easter Monday, a View near Epping," and "Easter Monday, a View near Windsor," were brought out by the Fullers in April, 1817. They measure 12 inches high by 18 $\frac{3}{8}$  wide. The view near Windsor has in its title margin a verse by Henry Alken :

" Away the London sportsmen ride,  
And risk their necks at every stride ;  
In torrents rush so swift and strong  
The yeomen prickers are borne along  
Against their right good will."

These prints were published under the pseudonym Ben Tally Ho ; they prove that Alken had found himself. Then, in 1819, describing himself as author of *Qualified Horses and Unqualified Riders, Sporting Discoveries, or The Miseries of Hunting, etc.*, he brought out his very notable Real M. set, Real Meltonian, *How to Qualify for a Meltonian*, six plates in all.

In these plates, engraved by Alken himself, there is banter, even witty satire ; a mood of high comedy free from caricature. Prints of this character belong to H. A.'s graphic memoirs, for they come from appraising observation and reveal amusingly his critical attitude towards life and sport. The first and sixth plates are reproduced here from an untinted set of proofs in General Cowie's collection. The descriptive text, by Alken himself, is as autobiographical as a letter. Concerning Plate I., "How to go to Cover," he says :

" Be careful, even in your ride to cover, to sit with great apparent ease and grace, however uncomfortable it may be in reality. Let your horse be thoroughbred, and never ride at a less rate than 16 miles an hour. With

<sup>\*</sup> Through the Fullers also he issued *The Miseries of Shooting, The Miseries of Driving, and The Miseries of Campaigning*, each publication with seven plates.

† Three sets more of six plates each, published by the Fullers, were H. A.'s *Some Will and Some Won't, Some Do and Some Don't*, and *Some of the Right Sort Doing the Thing*.



A MELTONIAN.



GOING TO THE MEET—THE HACK.  
A bay horse, the perfection of the thick set hack. Note the rider's overalls to keep the mud off going to the meet.  
*Lord and Lady Daresbury's collection.*







THE HUNTING FIELD.



CHARGING A STILE AND A DITCHED FENCE.

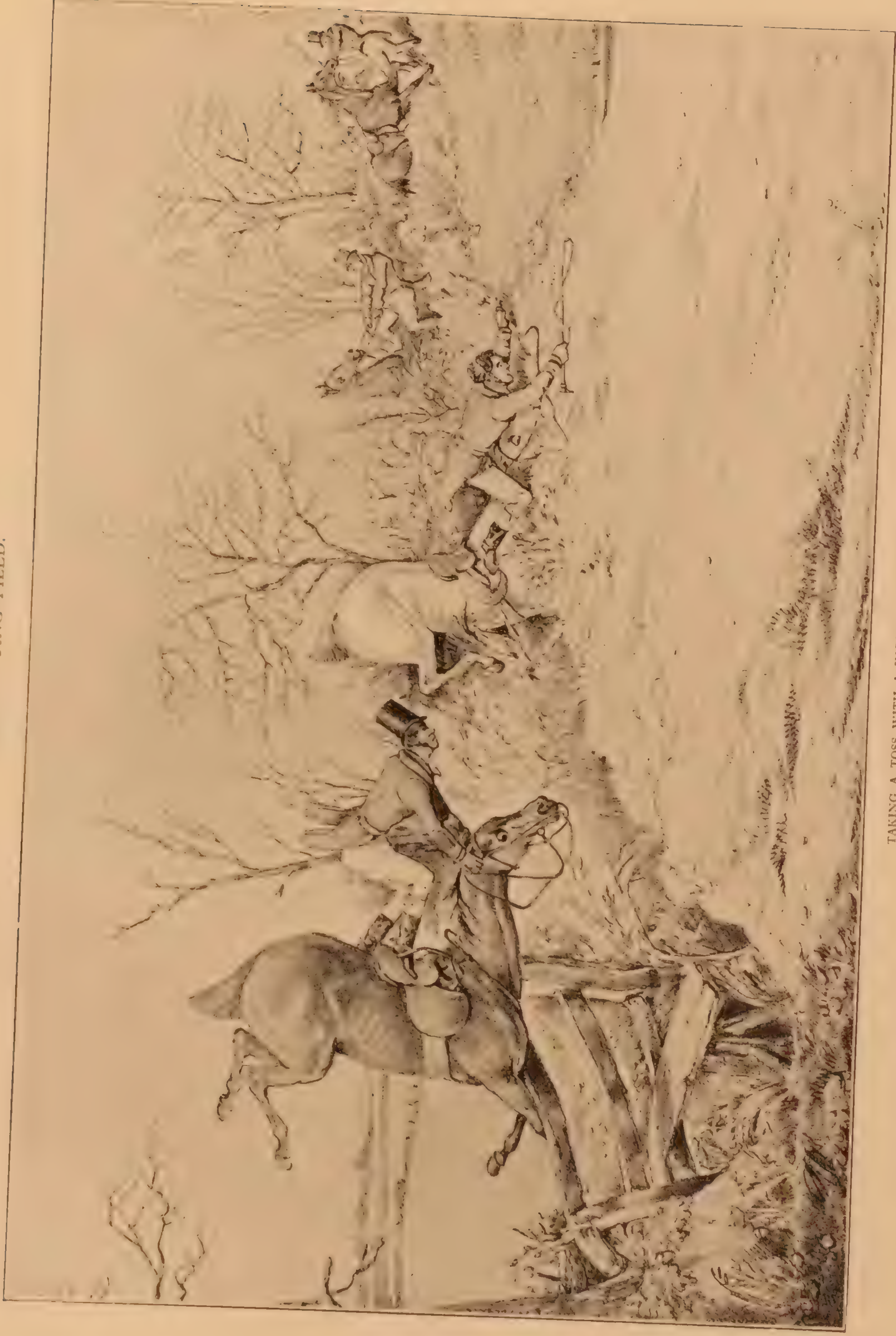
*From the Oliver Behrens Collection.*







THE HUNTING FIELD.



TAKING A TOSS WITH A VARIETY OF EFFECTS.

*From the Oliver Behrens Collection.*

In these hunting episodes, that illustrate what happens on both sides of a ditched and fenced bank, Henry Alken is even more adventurous than a Real Meltonian, his astounding high spirits doing by day what a very similar mood does by moonlight in "The First Steeplechase." Yet he shows, even here, his fondness for miniaturist delicacy and precision. With what a lingering care and affection every part of the landscape is handled!











FROM "THE REAL M." SERIES.



HOW TO QUALIFY FOR A MELTONIAN : HOW TO GO TO COVER.  
Published, July 16th, 1819, by S. & J. Fuller, at their Sporting Gallery, 34, Rathbone Place.



HOW TO QUALIFY FOR A MELTONIAN : HOW TO TAKE THE LEAD.  
*From original proof engravings, untinted, by Henry Alken, in Gen. Cowie's collection.*



regard to dress, I shall say but little as I have given the costume as nearly as possible in the following plates, but I must observe that Real Meltonians either are, or affect to be, a very hardy race ; they disdain the frock coat used by their forefathers and appear as here represented. I shall not be surprised in the course of another season to see them (if they are not extinct) dressed in silk caps and jackets."

Plate VI. : "How to Take The Lead" :

"Very few sporting men arrive at this elevated situation. If, by being well laid in, you have an opportunity of taking the lead, do it at all risks. You must have no more fellow-feeling in fox-hunting than you have in your political career. Ride straight to your point. Should you be called upon to make your appearance before a coroner's jury, you may calculate on the pleasure you will afterwards receive, by the side of every cover where you are known, to hear—in an undertone—such observations as, *That is one of the most desperate riders in the world*, etc. ; and you will have the *satisfaction* of knowing it to be true. Do something like all this, and you may at last be taken for a *Real M.*"

This mockery illustrates several things in Osbaldeston's Meltonian experiences, notably the fact that he withdrew his hounds from the field several times, as a protest against bad sportsmanship.

On another plate, "How to Take a Leap," with your left hand thrust boastfully in a pocket of your breeches, Alken writes :

"To imitate in this case you must be endowed by nature with great courage and possess a high-toned set of nerves. Even in the leap let your seat possess as much as possible of the Meltonian swing. Let your attitude be extremely careless, but at the same time determinedly singular. Pick your leaps high and strong. However extraordinary the leap may be, never appear to think it of consequence. If you should fail in the attempt, carelessly curse your horse, and compare the fence, however large, to anything extravagant that may suit your fancy, such as a row of peas or cabbages. Endeavour to do all this, and perhaps you may be taken for a *Real M.*"

Plate V. : "How to go through An Overflow," with a take-off at full gallop, enables Alken to say :

"Here you have an opportunity of showing your courage to the



greatest advantage. All common-rate sportsmen would consider this something like madness, unless they were well acquainted with the country. Do what others dare not—ride through every overflow, if straight, with the hounds, even should a river run through it, which, by-the-bye, you may generally calculate upon, so that you and your horse, on that account, may stand a chance of taking a dive somewhat resembling the Hippopotamus in the Niger. Do all this, and you stand an excellent chance of being taken for a Real M.”

Ten years later, 1829, H. A. returned to the subject of Hunting Qualifications, composing and etching six good plates that Ackermann published : “ The Appointment,” “ Getting Away,” “ A Slap at a Park Fence,” “ Getting over,” “ Slap at a Brook,” and “ Creeping a Finish.” This set, too, illustrates very well the contrast between great speed and miniaturist precision.

And now the question arises : Did H. A. himself obey his precepts ? Did *he* become a real Meltonian ? I have no doubt that he did, for enough evidence can be gleaned from the book that he wrote and published in 1816, *Beauties and Defects in the Figure of The Horse*, where he “ flatters himself that his work will be found useful . . . as his remarks are the result of the most attentive observation during many years, *entirely devoted to pleasures of the field* . . .” And Henry relates besides, later in the book, that he has “ been much in the habit of riding young and violent horses with foxhounds . . .”

Through two seasons he was completely Meltonic, his mount being a very hot mare with a genius for buck-jumping, “ four years old and excessively violent, although a powerful leaper as to height and distance. For the first season I had four or five falls a day upon an average, and all in consequence of her violent mode of leaping.” No wonder he became very fond of showing in his pictures and sketches an abundant variety of falls ! But a young artist, married, and with several small children, had no right to take risks in such madcap hunting. Suppose he had crippled his right arm and hand !

Henry was only twenty-four when he married Maria Gordon, at



THE HUNTING FIELD



AT FULL GALLOP!

Compare the style of this plate with that in the painting by Henry Gordon Alken, facing p. 20  
*From a characteristic study by Henry Alken, in the Oliver Behrens Collection.*







Ipswich, in 1809, and to cut a dash with the Meltonians while supporting his wife and babies in London was not a mild adventure in finance. How did he pay for it? What did he earn as "Ben Tally Ho" by selling copyrights? Had his wife a dowry like Mrs. C. J. Apperley, and did he spend a portion of it on that buck-jumping mare? He may have earned a good deal of money by training young horses in the hunting field, and by selling them at high prices. We know that Nimrod "made" hunters for sale, and found the work profitable. It is annoying that Henry Alken's early life remains a mystery. Whenever I have tried, in long research, to learn something definite about it, I have drawn blank. But Alken was interested by horse-dealing, for he ended his book on *Beauties and Defects in the Figure of the Horse* with nine good pages of "Hints to Purchasers of Horses."

Gossip invented a story about his early days, declaring that he had served the Duke of Beaufort as huntsman, stud groom, or trainer. How did this idea, which ran counter to *Blackwood's* article, get a chance of seeming likely? It may have been suggested by a cheap portrait print of Alken as Ben Tally Ho, a lithograph by M. Gauci showing a hard-faced man who looks like a horsey servant, quite as much so as that sketch by Rowlandson in which George Morland stands with his back to a fireplace. In 1867, sixteen years after Henry Alken's death, the editor of *Notes and Queries* printed the gossip unverified, and other editors repeated it also, still unverified. Sir Walter Gilbey went away from this bad routine and was able to assure his readers that the Badminton records made no reference to any servant named Alken.

Henry lost his wife in 1841. He was living then in Spring Place, Mansfield Place, Kentish Town, now Wills Road off Holmes Road. Afterwards he removed to Ivy Cottage, Highgate Rise, where he ended his days in 1851, an unmarried daughter, Elizabeth, living with him to the end.

And now let us think for a few moments of Henry Alken's sons. The eldest one, as we have seen, was born at Ipswich in 1810, and he died in London in 1894, two years later than the date given in books of reference.



He is dubbed a forger by Gilbey, doing work to be sold fraudulently as his father's. If so, he suffered at last a complete failure as he ended his life in a workhouse. Among his last clients was Mr. Leon J. Drew, partner in a firm of biscuit manufacturers, who offered again for sale what he had bought, often to Mr. Fores, and also to Mr. W. T. Spencer, but the pictures became too bad to find a market.

Whether the younger Henry Alken was a deliberate forger, as Gilbey believed, or a weak fool who traded on his father's name and style rather than trust his own gifts, is a matter of opinion. Mr. George P. Fores thinks that he should be let down as lightly as possible, and no harm will be done if we do not add the word forger to a dead man's troubled character. He never signed his full name on pictures for the market, and even H. Alken, junior, was a very uncommon signature. It appears on a set of four coloured aquatints done after his work by Charles Hunt, published by Lewis, of Leadenhall Street, and illustrating with vim "The Last Grand Steeplechase Held at the Hippodrome Race Course, Kensington," I think about 1840. At an earlier date, 1834, the younger Henry Alken published "The Herne Bay Grand Steeplechase," a coloured etching 10½ inches by 14½ inches, with the horses' names and their riders printed beneath.

There are school qualities of art in the Alken family, and school qualities in matters of style have much in common with that family likeness that Sir Henry Irving passed on to his two sons, making their careers as gifted actors more difficult, even more hazardous.

Thanks to Messrs. Fores, I am able to reproduce one of two very typical little oils by the younger Henry Alken, dating from 1849, "The First Introduction to Hounds," and "Renewal of Acquaintance with Hounds." Originally these pictures were bought by Fores and reproduced, becoming popular as coloured prints. The man who painted them had no reason to hide his full name; they have some merits and their Alkenish style is as reputable as any other school method and outlook. Each is signed H. Alken only, and the real H. Alken was still alive in 1849.





RENEWAL OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH HOUNDS.  
By Henry Alken's eldest son, Henry Gordon. *From an oil painting that belongs to Messrs. Fores.*













" I HAVE A NOTION THAT THIS IS WHAT IS CALLED A BOG, AND I AM CONFIRMED IN MY NOTION THAT HOUNDS CAN GO WHERE HORSES CANNOT."

*From an original water-colour by Henry Alken, in Major Oswald Magniac's collection.*



AFTERNOON : A FEW OF THE RIGHT SORT WHO HAVE DONE THE THING.

Soft ground etching by Henry Alken, published in 1824 by S. and J. Fuller. *From the Oliver Behrens Collection.*



But they were published as the son's work, and old Henry did not protest against his son's signature. He may have helped Henry Gordon ; but, in any case, the freshness of English countrysides finds loving expression in these landscapes, and horses and riders are handled confidently and with some humour.

Another of Alken's sons, Seffrien, born in 1821, became a sporting artist by profession. He worked from about 1845 to 1873, when he died at the age of fifty-two, in the parish of Newington, Southwark. Some of his racehorses—take his portrait print of Gay Dayrell, a Derby winner—have merit, and belong permanently to the history of the turf. There is also a print of Brighton Race Stand in the year 1852 that does justice to Seffrien Alken. As a rule his signature is incomplete, for he makes his appeal, not as Seffrien Alken, but as one of the S. Alkens who are often as teasing as chess problems.

According to Gilbey's research Henry Alken had another son, George, who, in 1862, was found drowned near Woolwich. Efforts to verify his birth have failed, and Somerset House has no record of his death. So Mr. Kendall suggests that the George Alken in sporting art was Henry Alken's brother, not his son. Some lithographs by a G. Alken—they measure 7 $\frac{1}{16}$  inches high by 10 $\frac{1}{16}$  inches wide—have the date 1822, and the imprint of Rowney and Forester's Lithographic Press, 51, Rathbone Place, London. Henry Alken worked now and then in lithography, as in his "Rudiments for Drawing the Horse," published in parts and in paper wrappers by S. and J. Fuller, 1822. It is remarkable that G. Alken and Henry Alken should have published lithographic plates simultaneously, and from the same street, Rathbone Place. Five years later, as Mr. Kendall has pointed out, George Alken drew and engraved a series of at least six racehorses, which S. W. Fores published from 41, Piccadilly. These particular plates, 7 inches by 10 inches, are seen in the market only from time to time ; they are touched with a delicate and trained hand, George being a miniaturist. George was alive in 1831, but died, probably before 1837, when general registration of births, marriages and deaths became law.



But I do not wish to linger over these lesser Alkens, as they draw attention from my real subject, the great Henry, whose best productions—fine drawings in good condition, mint state proofs of familiar sporting subjects, illustrated books beautifully bound, and some oil-paintings—have risen steadily in price, though they have not been boomed. Indeed, no popular artist has ever had his reputation more assailed by cheap reproductions, and by fraudulent imitations. There is no need to say that commercial reproductions are altogether deplorable, since they do carry sport and the fields of England into big towns. Note, too, that whenever a pawnbroker in a side street or a dealer in second-hand “wardrobes” wants to brighten his window display, he chooses generally several reproductions after Henry Alken’s hunting pieces.

Three years ago his contest with Frankland—the two publications, first editions, with title pages, bound together charmingly—was offered for sale in London, at the Lotus Library, for £60; and his hand-coloured aquatint plates in Nimrod’s *Life of a Sportsman*, thirty-six in all, though late-period work, 1842, are raising the price of finely bound first-edition copies of that book. When a copy is in the original blue cloth gilt, with gilt edges, and the thirty-six plates are all in brilliant state, the present-day price ranges from £150 (Sotheran, 1925) to £212 (Sotheby’s, 1924).

A choice copy of another Nimrod book, the *John Mytton*, in its extended second edition, 1837, with eighteen coloured aquatints by Henry Alken and T. J. Rawlins, I have seen catalogued at £150. In Robert T. Vyner’s famous book, *Notitia Venatica*, dating from 1841, Henry Alken has a few very attractive plates, that add value to Vyner’s authority.

And consider some of the original prices that Henry Alken’s own publications were sold at. His *Sketch Book* of 1823, with forty-two plates, quarto, neatly half-bound, cost 28s.; and his *Sporting Scrap Book* of 1824, fifty plates, neatly half-bound, was equally cheap. His *Symptoms of being Amazed*, and his *Symptoms of being Amused*, both dating from 1822, forty-three plates in colour cost four guineas, and *Blackwood’s Magazine* gave a very ardent welcome to those prints that represent







THE HUNTING FIELD.



FULL CRY

*From the water-colour drawing by Henry Alken in the Oliver Bohns Collection.*



shooting parties and driving parties, parties that are overturned, other parties that flirt and others that fight. These, said *Blackwood's*, "are all and each of them nearly divine." And the *Symptoms* were very popular. As Gen. Cowie has pointed out, McLean the publisher announced an unprecedented sale of 30,000.

Tastes differ, and Alken's incessant need of money invaded too many print markets ; only one was left unvisited, or nearly so : the one where grossness and lust were sixpence in monochrome and a shilling coloured, or thereabouts. There is something pathetic in the medley of appeals for money that Alken added to his finer sportsmanship : it shows the struggle of life at a time when dozens of good horsemen were so enraptured with hunting and the Turf that they never took the field with Wellington's hounds in the Peninsula ; and after Waterloo, when financial crisis passed through stirring politics into industrial penury, strikes, lock-outs, and the Chartist riots, H. A. needed a tough courage and untiring enterprise. In 1818 he tried his hand at military history, doing a large and vigorous plate of Waterloo.

At all costs he would be a public servant, striving day by day to entertain, that his work might circulate freely enough to be popular. That he littered rubbish among his better productions is evident to us all, of course, but why should we mind ? To do that was very much manlier than to trifle with the artistic vanity that says : " I'm not in a mood for work. Let duns go to the devil ! I don't care ! " Even when H. A. became ailing and embittered, his vigour and variety of appeal continued, and some productions of his last period had a strong enough heart to keep them in circulation.

Let us turn now to his finer hunting subjects and steeplechasing, helped by typical pictures, prints and drawings from very good private collections, Lord and Lady Daresbury's, Mr. Oliver Behrens', Gen. Cowie's, and Major Oswald Magniac's. Mr. G. P. Fores, too, like Mr. George Kendall, has given his help gladly, aiding this monograph in many ways.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Henry Alken and Composition

THE word composition is chosen here because H. A. is not among the few artists who are *possessed by* the wonderful varied quality called Design, a quality that is innate, and in its best sense incommunicable. Any person who has a great desire to cover a piece of paper with an arrangement of lines and shapes to be framed as a drawing, can learn from a capable teacher a great deal about composition ; and with continuous practice, will employ what he has learnt more and more freely and expressively, within limits imposed by his gifts. Two sorts of limitation are always active in the practice of drawing or painting, one sort governed by the shape and size of the paper or canvas chosen, and the other by the fact that individual gifts have different stopping points of development.

When an artist is a composer only there is a something too much or too little in the pattern that is formed by lines and masses vital with emotion ; but when nature has made him a master of design we feel that nothing could be altered in his work without loss ; there is wanted neither less nor more in his conception, and in his order and style. Not that we should find fault with composition because of its inferiority to design. There are species in all things that live and grow, and each should be treated fairly ; and even some master painters, like Reynolds, have failed as designers when they have passed from portraiture into ambitious figure pictures, which required more imagination in their conception and organic treatment.

Only one popular artist of Henry Alken's time, Rowlandson, was governed by the inborn enchanter called Design. Unfortunately, his wayward life ran counter to it, often defaming its productions by pimping appeals for money with subjects too coarse to be chosen ; but Design remained active, day after day, and no kindred work by later English artists





A SOFT GROUND ETCHING SHOWING MOVEMENTS IN THE STANDING LEAP.  
*From the Oliver Behrens Collection.*











FROM A SET OF FOUR OIL COLOURS.



DRAWING THE COVER.

Note the parson in the centre of the three mounted sportsmen. The white-legged chestnut on the left, and the brown lashing out, are much to the front in this set. So is the grey. They are possibly portraits in a series of four pictures of which two are given in this monograph. Some influence from Francis Grant, Alken's junior, seems to be active in this composition. Grant had influence also on Ferneley, and Ferneley in 1850 exhibited at the R.A. a portrait of Grant on a hunter.

*From the oil painting in Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection.*



has equalled Rowlandson's finest drawings. To put Rowlandson side by side with Alken within the same species of visual art—an art always more or less journalistic, a recorder of daily customs and national pastimes, of social moods, fashions, follies, and changing manners—would be uncritical, Rowlandson being a Big Man, and Alken at his best a Little Master, whose species of sporting art belongs to himself.

Sometimes in hunting compositions painted in oils, he rises above his normal level. He does so in "The Oakley Hunt," and in several pictures now in Lord and Lady Daresbury's collection. Two from the Daresbury collection are illustrated in this chapter. They show that Alken now and then wished to be influenced by the suave and fashionable manner of Francis Grant.

Towards all impressions that Alken received from daily life, in both towns and the country, he was exceedingly alert, so he picked up knowledge with ease and retained for use what his memory had collected. On the other hand, he was not very sensitive towards pictures and drawings by other artists, for they had only a few occasional effects on his outlook and style, such as we find in a drawn composition from the Behrens Collection—a hunting scene outside a country alehouse called "The Refreshment," with tired foxhounds friezed across the foreground, and just behind them another friezed line of horses and sportsmen, with some other figures. There are touches borrowed from Rowlandson, as in the amorous struggle near the inn door; also in a feeling for weight, and the downward pressure on the ground that bulky bodies express when they stand upright.

Alken puts enough "body" into men on horseback generally; they sit so well and so firmly in their saddles that, if we like, we can guess their weight in stones; but as soon as his men touch earth, his tendency then is to make their feet too small and the shadows they throw unreal, uncertain and attenuated. These marks of his style are present even in this alehouse yard, in spite of Rowlandson's accepted influence. Alken rebelled against cast shadows; seldom—if ever—did he show how variously vertical things are duplicated horizontally by their shadows; and about twenty years



after his death there was a little set of painters, called the Capri Group, that prided itself on being shadowless.

Can we explain why Alken did not add to his composition the shadowscapes on earth that daily rivalled in beauty the cloudscapes of English skies ? The explanation is to be found, I believe, in his developing passion for speed, which he called " swishing pace." Even when heavy women and men were standing in the sun he declined to carry their weight into their feet and varying breadth and length of cast shadows. To do so would have made him feel at rest, very much at ease, as captains of sailing ships felt when they took in all sail and dropped anchor. Similarly, the hoofs of H. A.'s horses are often too small, too thoroughbred, to be in proportion with the horses' heads. And yet he liked the heads of horses to be unduly small. To take an example. In his book, *Beauties and Defects in the Figure of the Horse*, Plate IX., he gives a soft-ground etching of a hunter whose head is plainly too small, yet he says in his text that " the animal was accounted one of the finest figures in England, although at the time the portrait was taken he was ten years old, and had done a great deal of work, both in the field and in harness. A small head and neck are considered a great beauty in a horse ; and in the original of this drawing I think they were the least I ever saw, in proportion to the body."

Every sporting artist of Alken's period obeyed this fashion more or less ; but a change came after photography, in the profile views of horses standing still, began to show correctly the proportional length and weight of horses' heads. There are times when Alken's work does show correct proportion in this particular, as in the set of tinted drawings called " A Steeplechase," 1827 ; his excessive liking for a head and neck too small is much less habitual than his disregard for the patterning of shadows. Indeed, his racehorses and hunters throw such feeble shadows, as a rule, and stand so lightly, at times so airily, that they suggest his liking for speed even when they stand quite still. The lengthening of cast shadows on a sunny afternoon in winter, though very beautiful, left him unattracted.

Examine his winter shadows, after a grand day with hounds, in his



FROM THE HIGH METTLED RACER SERIES



PLATE II.—LUNGING THE COLT.  
*The Oliver Behrens Collection.*







soft-ground etchings of "A Few of the Right Sort who have Done the Thing," where he reveals again his liking for a frieze-like composition. A varied impression of stiffness and fatigue is there, but it could be bettered in two ways: by allowing the sun to throw sprawling shadows, and by splashing the hunters with sweat and mud. The companion drawing, "A Few of the Right Sort who are Going to Do the Thing," has morning shadows Alkenised, and another frieze treatment.

Other variations of these characteristics are illustrated in these pages; and among them are four very good and frieze-like drawings from Major Magniac's collection, "Drawing the Cover" and "Gone Away!" "Over the Water," and "The Death." See plates facing p. 12. They date from H. A.'s best period, like the four original drawings that he made for the "Leicestershire Covers," engraved in 1824 by T. Sutherland. The "Covers" show a day's sport—with the place names engraved across the inscription borders—from a meet at Kirby Gate, close by Sir F. Burdett's many-gabled house, to the breaking cover near Billesdon Coplow, through Whissendine pasture at full cry, to the death hard by Kettleby. Each of these drawings is a frieze arrangement of many horses and riders, the most typical of all being the "Full Cry," where Alken's great "swishing pace," in its onrush from right to left, culminates in a flying leap over rails, while enabling us to feel right-handed as our answering sympathy moves with the crescendo.

On my table is a tinted engraving of this "Full Cry," and the leaping hunter is made much darker than all the others, while on the extreme right a pale chestnut has a darkish shadow under him, upon the turf, just to delay his gallop where the crescendo begins. Far in the background, and scattered, are many moving specks, horses and riders; these, too, are very typical of Alken's mood when speed swishes him along. But a silent background would be much better for his governing aim than a much ado with moving specks.

The "Leicestershire Covers" drawings belong to Mr. Oliver Behrens, like the high-mettled racer series, from which three typical drawings are



reproduced in this book : “ The Foal,” “ Lunging the Colt,” and “ The Hunter.” We are fortunate, indeed, to find that these notable compositions, all more or less frieze-like, have never been rubbed by careless handling or by friction in portfolios. In “ Lunging the Colt,” cast shadows are almost absent, and the standing figures on our right, miniature studies, have feet that are too small.

There is a very rare and beautiful etching by H. A. that shows on one sheet six small plates of “ The Life of a Racehorse.” It dates from about 1826, and a reader of this monograph may have a good impression of it. General Cowie has seen one—and only one—impression; it belonged to Grego; and I have dim recollections of another. A comparative study should be written and illustrated on the sets of prints which have been published on the drama of rise and fall in the life of a racer. The earliest known to me was painted by T. Gooch and exhibited in 1783; these pictures, or a set like them, were aquatinted in 1792 by Gooch himself, and published by Edward Jeffery, with an essay by Dr. Hawksworth, “ tending to excite a benevolent conduct to the Brute Creation.” Six prints : “ When a Foal with his Dam,” “ When a Colt Breaking,” “ After Running a Race and Winning,” “ As a Hunter going out to the Chase,” “ As a Post-Chaise Horse on the Road,” and “ His Dissolution.” Henry Alken, then, followed an example set by Gooch, as Ansell did in seven compositions engraved by Jukes. In J. F. Herring’s “ Life of a Racehorse ” there are a dozen plates.

Alken passed on to some of his imitators his fondness for a frieze-like composition, perhaps without knowing that Francis Barlow made a similar fondness real and impressive in his masterpiece, “ The Southern Hounds.” From many examples of Alken’s influence in this matter I choose C. Cooper Henderson’s “ Returning from Ascot Races ” and J. D. Paul’s entertaining “ Trip to Melton Mowbray,” fourteen plates on twelve sheets in colours, 21 feet in all, and sometimes fitted with a roller-box. This comedy was brought out by S. and J. Fuller, and an advertisement described it as “ an essay on foxhunting, giving at one view all the points of a fox



SOME INFLUENCE FROM ROWLANDSON.



SPORTSMEN AND HOUNDS OUTSIDE A VILLAGE INN.

*From an original drawing by Henry Alken in the Oliver Behrens Collection. Engraved in 1818 as "The Refreshment."*







FROM THE HIGH METTLED RACER SERIES.



PLATE 4.—THE HUNTER.

*From an original drawing in the Oliver Behrens Collection. Engraved by Alken and Sutherland.*







chase ; the starting from the top of St. James' Street to the return home from the hunt. Etched by Henry Alken from the original drawings by John Dean Paul, Esq. . . ." Why "Esq".? Why not Sir John Dean Paul? There were two John Dean Pauls, one a plain Mister, the other a baronet. Both of them drew and painted, and Sir John wrote some tales in verse about horses.

Another of the Fullers publishing adventures—presumably with Alken's inspiration as motive-power—I have not yet seen : "Panorama of the Progress of Human Life," many hundreds of figures in a moving frieze 15 feet long, illustrating Shakespeare's Ages and the manners, costumes, customs and field sports of the English people. In Alken's "Going to Epsom Races" several hundreds of figures were introduced, and there are phases of the frieze idea in John Dean Paul's "Four Prints of Leicestershire Foxhunting," which the publisher McLean announced as "containing the acknowledged taste and judgment of Mr. Paul with the graphic skill of Mr. Alken." Yet Alken's name was not put on the plates with Paul's, so I assume that Paul paid very well for Alken's work. Finally, the frieze idea found its way into some coaching pictures, notably those by James Pollard.

Among other points in H. A. that affect his composition I choose four. When his work begins to decline his foxhounds, now and then, resemble beagles. It is well to examine with great care his horses' forelegs from their knees downwards, for sometimes they look unliving and even brittle. When you study him in figure compositions, both serious and humorous, seek for his own etched and engraved prints, for they are generally better than the interpretative work by Bentley, Sutherland, etc. ; and, further, prints and proofs in monochrome are often preferable, as a great deal of hurried tinting in water-colour was done by hacks for printsellers.

His best "Hunting Toast," much influenced by Clennell's "Fox-hunters' Regaling," is a soft-ground etching,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches ; it sums up very well his memories of sport, like the illustrative drawing in which he does justice to the famous hunting tailor, Hastings, who followed



the hounds always on foot, six days a week, when possible, and was generally in at—or close by—the death. There is good fun in his *Moments of Fancy* (1823), as in all his characteristic sketches of hunting and sporting; some laughable farce and whims are found among his forty-two plates of *Sporting Ideas* (1830); and it is well to look with care through his *Progressive Sports, Town versus Country, Notions, Real Life in London, You Shall See My Stud* (1831), *Necessary Qualifications of a Man of Fashion, Humorous Specimens of Riding, Rural and Sporting Sketches, Some Will and Some Won't, Some do and Some do Not, Hunting—or Six Hours' Sport of Three Real Good Ones from the East End, Tutor's Assistant, Doing the Thing and the Thing Done, Illustrations of Landscape Scenery, Flowers from Nature, Involuntary Thoughts, The Master George set, and Sporting Anecdotes*. His tinted drawings of equestrian Arabs, delicate miniatures, invite attention, like the prints in which he makes fun of Byron's poetry (1822). For Morier's quarto on Persia, 1818, H. A. etched several prints after Morier's drawings, the best one being a fine double-page that represents the "Entry of the King of Persia into Teheran." Persian horses appear also in his sketch books, and their saddles, bridles and other details do not look copied somehow. General Cowie wonders whether H. A. went to Persia with Morier, as William Alexander visited China, and Augustus Atkinson Russia. There is often something in H. A.'s work that raises questions about H. A. himself, while bringing us nearer to the period that he served untiringly as a graphic journalist.

What may I choose here as an epitome of his fun in figure compositions? May I pick out his monochrome proofs in broad soft-ground etching of *One Day's Sport of Three Real Good Ones*? It is sport with guns dating from 1823, and showing in six biggish prints that H. A. did his full best. Plate IV. is a good fight with countrymen, "Johnny Raws," and Plate VI. a tipsy supper where all are reconciled. But every age has its own graphic humour, and only a small amount of it keeps fresh and lasting in the memories of later generations. Humour and caricature of Alken's time have to be viewed in their relation to the dullness of long





"SEPTEMBER." PARTRIDGE SHOOTING.  
*From an oil painting by Henry Alken, in Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection.*







winter evenings in family life when theatres did not exist in many places. The Messrs. Fores of those times used to hire out portfolios of prints for evening amusement, and Alken in his publications catered variously for the fireside.

In one of his publications, *Illustrations to Popular Songs*, 1825, forty-three plates, including the frontispiece, there is an address that says :

“ Swans sing before they die.” “ 'Twere no bad thing  
Should some folk die before they sing.”

“ So whispered a friend to Mr. Alken when they were once compelled to hear the discordant notes of a volunteer at a convivial party. ‘ I wish it were so,’ said the artist ; ‘ but the words of the song furnish a good subject for a sketch ’ ; and he soon presented his friend with the illustration of ‘ Begone Dull Care.’ This was much approved of, and became the first symptom of *The Illustrations to Popular Songs*. . . .”

Alken, then, was a very rapid worker ; and sometimes his routine was carried by emotion into inspired production. Once I examined a mint state set of very well tinted proofs of “ The First Steeplechase on Record,” and it looked like a fine nightmare in art of H. A.’s adoration of speed.

Among the rarest of his compositions I choose a set of six proofs forming the *You Shall See My Stud* series, published by Rudolph Ackermann, junior, July 1st, 1831. I have seen only one complete copy of this important work, complete with its title-page and text ; and it was bought a few months ago by Mr. W. T. Spencer.



## CHAPTER FOUR

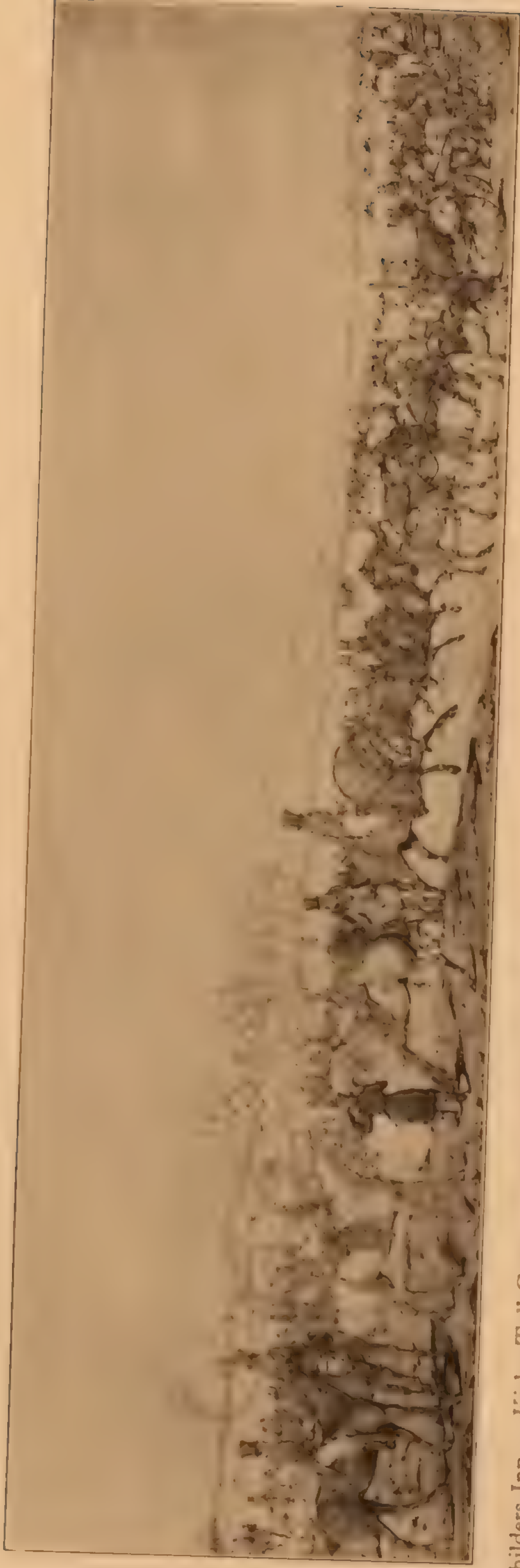
### H. A. on Jumping and Pace

**W**OULD he prefer steeplechasing to hunting? A friend of mine says : " There can't be any doubt on *that* point. Cross-country races with their wagers, bets and accidents were just what H. A. needed ; they set his genius to a very fine edge. And when a fine run with hounds resembled a race, or steeplechase, he was in his element, as in the famous series of prints called " The Quorn Hunt," that help to illustrate the doings of George Osbaldeston. Don't you feel and see it ? " Sometimes, but not convincingly. The autobiographical aspects of H. A.'s work are confused, and too contradictory for positive opinions to be passed upon their totality ; but everyone can see that his liking for miniature qualities of handicraft, continuous in his best work, come as typically from caution and concentration as his passion for speed and wild leaping comes from impulse and sprinting competition. When invariable notes of style oppose one another they are things to be accepted, they cannot be explained. I think it possible that Henry Alken, temperamentally, was like Charles Lever, a shy man of genius easy to deject and offend, who reacted into high spirits from depression and melancholy. His delight in swishing pace may have been among his reactions, an escape from his normal self. At any rate there are contradictions between the moods in his art and his grandchildren's accounts of his character, and also between his written precepts and his practice as a hunting specialist with pencil and brush.

Take his attitude towards galloping. One cannot say that he *never* makes use of the classical gallop, that rocking-horse movement which the Renaissance inherited as a tradition from ancient sculpture and decoration, Roman, Greek and Egyptian. It is used now and then among the far-distant horsemen that Alken puts into his hunting pieces ; and we find it



THE LEICESTERSHIRE COVERS SERIES

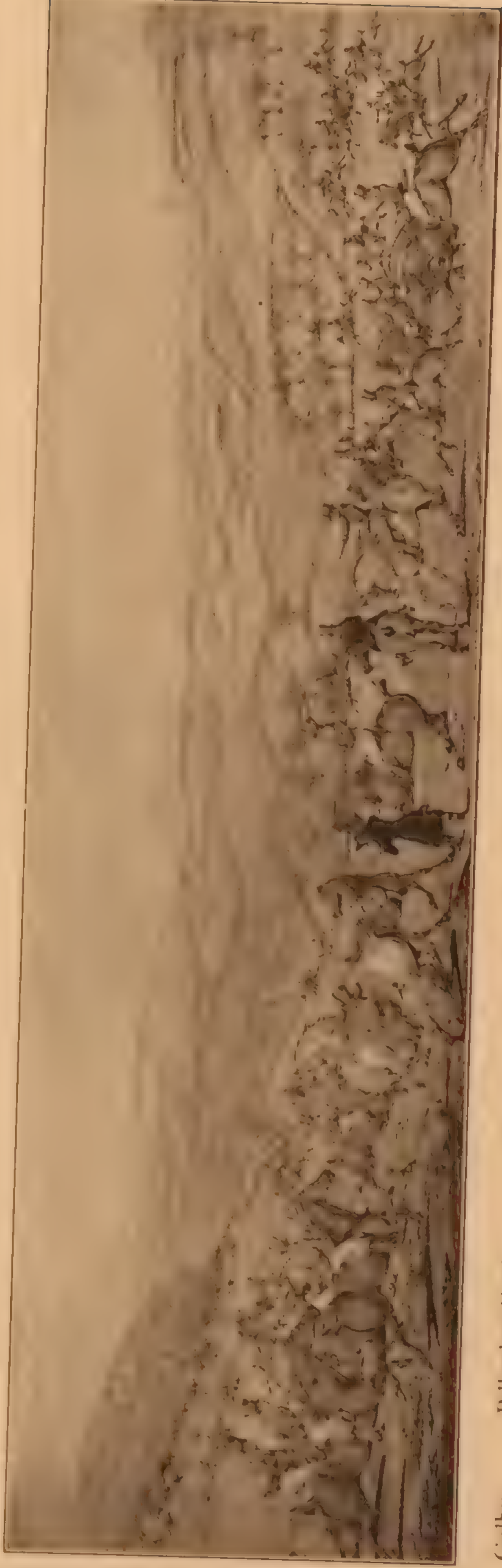


Childers Inn. Kirby Toll Gate.

Sir F. Burdett's House.

PLATE I. THE MEET AT KIRBY GATE.

Melton Mowbray.



Galby.

Billesdon Coplow.

Houghton. Botany Bay  
Cover.

Scrap Tott Heyham.

Ingersby  
Spinney.

Hungerton. Barkby  
Holt. Quenby  
Hall.

PLATE II.—BREAKING COVER—BILLESDON COPLOW.

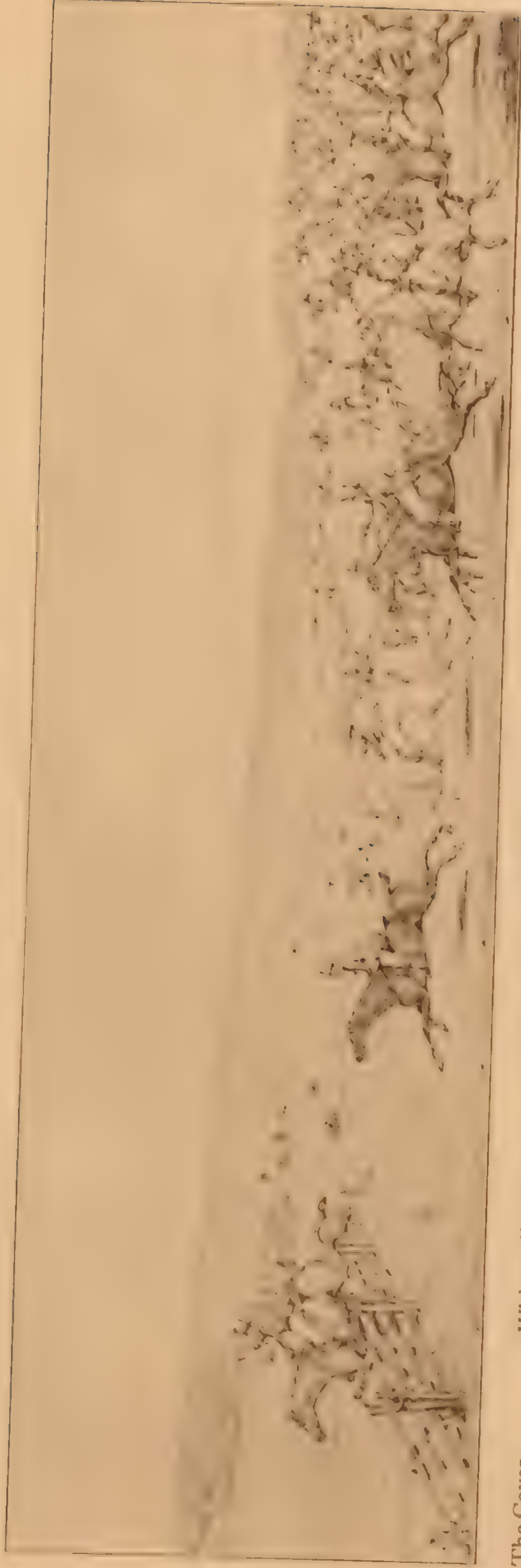
*Reproduced from original drawings in the Oliver Behrens Collection.*







THE LEICESTERSHIRE COVERS SERIES



The Cover.

Whissendine Brook.

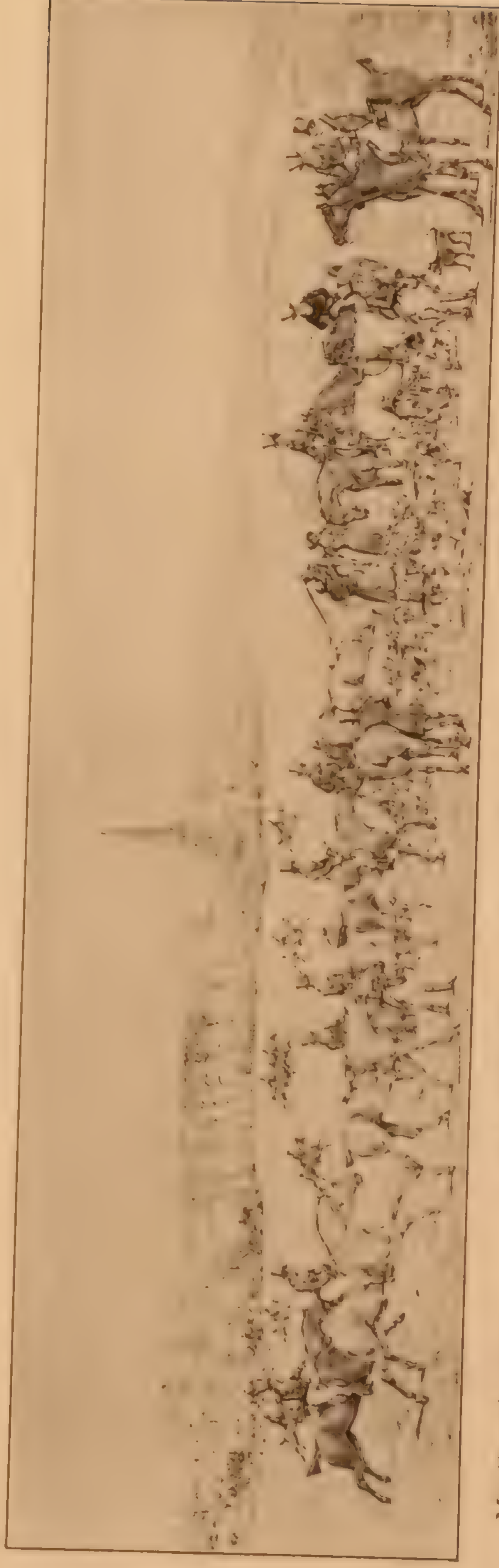
Freeby Wood. Waltham Stonesby.

Buckminster.

Wymondham.

PLATE III.—FULL-CRY—WHISSENDINE PASTURE.

Whissendine.



Mr. Crosse's House.

Great Home Close.

Kettleby Church.

Road to Melton.

Billesdon Coplow.

PLATE IV.—THE DEATH—VIEW OF KETTLEBY.

*From original drawings by Henry Alken, in the Oliver Behrens Collection.*







also in one of his books, *Beauties and Defects in The Figure of the Horse*, where it is illustrated in Plate XIV. and described as "The Hunter's Gallop." And he explains it by saying that a hunter has to go through deep and heavy grounds, which compel him to gallop in a manner that differs from the gallop of racehorses. "It is not necessary," Alken adds, "that he should lay himself out in the reach like the racehorse; if he did, the difficulty he would find in gathering himself again would knock him up in ten minutes; or, at any rate, would greatly distress and disqualify him for a long day. His strokes should be short and regular, not throwing himself much off the balance. The hunter should also have the immediate power of extending or diminishing his length of stride; for until a horse can accomplish this part of his business he never can make a good leaper, much less a safe one. Having been myself much in the habit of riding young and violent horses with foxhounds, I am well acquainted with the great difficulty and danger there is in leaping them before they are possessed of this power and knowledge."

In another illustration, Plate XII., "The Canterer, or Lady's Horse," H. A. represents another rocking-horse motion, and says that his drawing is made from a pretty and showy horse that has neither speed nor good action; "the buttocks round, without any show of muscle; tight in the hocks and legs"; and "although the pastern is short and strong, his legs are not well able to carry his carcass"—a criticism we can pass fairly on many of Alken's own hunters. He adds: "I never had but one of this sort in my possession, which I bought during a lameness occasioned by an accident in hunting. He was, like the present subject, very showy, and by most people called handsome, but the first journey I took him—a distance of only eighteen miles—he performed with such extreme difficulty in three hours, that I never chose to mount him again. . . ."

Autobiography! And entertaining! But the main point is autobiography of another sort. Can you remember even one foreground hunter in Alken's prints and drawings that either canters or gallops in a rocking-horse manner? I can't. We must go to some other artists, as to J. N.



Sartorius, to find illustrations of Alken's written precepts. He illustrates, then criticises, other running movements, a harness trot and a running trot, also, of course, the new gallop at full stretch. He regards it as a racing motion, with necessary points that differ from those in hunters and road-horses. A racehorse, in the first place, "is not got up so much in the forehead, which makes a great difference in his appearance." "Ewe-necked horses are in general speedy, although this qualification is by no means desirable for any other purpose. It is commonly supposed that length in the pastern is indispensable in the racehorse, but this opinion appears to me to be very erroneous, except as it regards a light weight and a short course. I have taken notice that the best horses of the present day are well formed and strong in the legs. In full action the leg should be thrown well out, with a quick stroke, rather near to the ground than otherwise. All the legs should point straight forward, and appear to act with ease to themselves. If a horse should rock—that is, throw his quarters from one side to the other—he can never be speedy; he should seem to glide over the surface of the ground without any symptoms of violent action. Horses vary greatly in the gather, or method of bringing their legs together after being well opened in the reach. If he makes the stride too far it will oblige him to throw up his back like a hog to form the gather. Any action varying from a direct line forward must impede his progress. All horses should gallop nearly on the same principle; but it is necessary that military horses and dashing roadsters should raise themselves more on their haunches, and, as it is commonly called, fight a little more with their forehead."

Though this explanation is vague, as all writing from eye-evidence of rapid and complex motion will ever be, it proves that H. A. watched horses galloping as carefully as Turner watched waters flowing and eddying; and I often wonder what he would have said and done if instantaneous photography had been in vogue then, to show galloping horses in a great many very queer positions, comic, or painful, or grotesque, as though their swift motion had been arrested by convulsions or by paralysis. Could



THE HUNTING FIELD



FORWARD AWAY !  
The sportsman on the old chestnut has evidently viewed the fox away.







anything be more wayward than the camera? Its foreshortening of an animal in movement is invariably incorrect, and very often it falsifies even things at rest, such as buildings. This explains why art-critics prefer original sketches to photographs of historic architecture. In a book on topography in art no person of taste would wish to find photographic prints, unless they were taken from beautiful drawings. Yet a custom of to-day expects us to employ photographic evidence when we study the movements of running animals and the flight of birds!

Even sporting artists have accepted this custom, cribbing most of their equine movements from snapshots and films. Why? No attempt to show on paper and canvas an illusion of speed can be anything but a convention, good or bad; it may be called a bit of fiction intended to produce an enjoyable deception. And consider what photographs of a gallop do: they arrest its complexity in a series of untruths revealing fractions of a second in the movement of four rapid legs. Now and then a valuable hint can be chosen from these fractions of a second, particularly in photographs that show rapid pace in bipeds, an athlete sprinting or an alarmed ostrich stampeding. We cannot expect to glean many good hints from photographs when four legs are galloping. Who is entertained when newspaper prints from snapshots represent a Derby winner balked of victory, in a hideous posture near the winning post, with no trace of momentum even dimly suggested?

If a centipede were as big as a horse its most rapid movements shown in photography would illustrate, in marvellous ways, a lesson worth attention, for the number of legs employed in running govern the choice of conventions fitted to be used in art as illusions of speed. The more numerous the legs the less we should be influenced by photographs. For this reason, I believe, present-day hunting pictures and prints fail to hold their own against Henry Alken's best hunting scenes. As paintings they are often much better, but, camera-stricken, their conventions are so miscellaneous that they don't form illusional movements which, like metre and rhyme in poetry, make impressions on the mind that convince.



And it must not be thought that H. A. had no temptation to alter his own treatment of rapid movements in horses, for one artist of his time, seeking for variations, came near to some of the positions that photography would reveal. This particular artist was James Pollard, who showed in his racing panoramas thoroughbreds that galloped not only with all four legs off the ground, but all doubled up together. General Cowie has drawn attention to this matter. Pollard's experimenting dates from about 1825, and was thus contemporary with the earlier parts of Henry Alken's best period.

The late Lord Morley used to say that stern rules in the practice of an art, when obeyed with right judgment, aided conception and achievement. Photography in its actions on sporting art has cancelled all the old rules that sporting artists generally obeyed, and reaction is only just beginning to suggest effective compromises. Let us note meantime the amazing amount of continuous hard study that Henry Alken puts into his hunting movements in order that he may get from accepted conventions as much variation as appears rational to him. Who can estimate the number of drawings that he did with care of single horsemen in the act of leaping or in the crescendo of galloping? And since in his day cracks of the field rode much closer to hounds than they do now, his studies of single horsemen in action are always attended by several foxhounds.

There are very good studies of single horsemen and a few hounds in Mr. Oliver Behrens' collection, and Lord and Lady Daresbury have similar studies in oils, six in all, belonging to H. A.'s "Hunting Recollections," and typical of H. A. in a good mood. In one a rider with curly hair—H. A. himself, *perhaps*—stained with mud and galloping from left to right, exclaims: "So much for your pepper! Now I want it you turn out a top!" In another picture the same rider, having outdistanced the hounds, tops the deuce of a timber fence at breakneck speed, his right hand raised and his hat in the air. "By the Lord Harry," he reflects, "my chestnut horse can almost fly!" The same rider's twin brother appears in another episode, exclaiming: "'Ware Horse! D—— these hot horses! They are



## HUNTING RECOLLECTIONS

*From a set of six original paintings by Henry Alken, in Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection. Alken's etchings of these subjects date from 1829; they were published by Ackermann.*



I. "Ware horse! D—n these hot horses! They are seldom worth more than a bunch of dog's meat after a ten minutes' burst!"



II. "So much for your pepper! Now I want it you turn out a top!"









III. " Push on sharp at it, my Lord, there's the h—ll of a ditch on the farther side."



IV. " 'There, I knew how 'twould be—that 'ere Lord hasn't half enough devil in him ! "









V. "Essex to Wit."



VI. "By the Lord Harry, my chestnut horse can almost fly!"







seldom worth more than a bunch of dog's meat after a ten minutes' burst ! " This picture has two startled hounds in it well observed and painted atmospherically : they are better than the restive hunter and the tall rider, whose bodies are too silhouetted, and not fully in accord with that exclamation. All the hunters in this series of hunting recollections have volume and bulk.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### H. A. on Jumping and Pace (*continued*)

**I**N another picture called "Essex to Wit," belonging to the Daresbury Collection, a peculiar movement and emotion in a hunter is studied with care ; a grey hunter stepping up a bank to a low fence, suspiciously, and gazing beyond the fence, with an expression almost alarmed. Beyond the fence another horseman is disappearing, and his position shows that the drop is a steep one.

The same collection has notable hunting compositions, in oil, by Henry Alken. The finest one is a Full Cry in a favouring stretch of country with a ditch and fence extending from our right, in a curving line, to a distance full of mystery. This composition has unity allied with depth and space, varied rhythm in action, and a realism which is almost a forerunner of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. This picture, and three others in the Daresbury Collection seem to prove that H. A. accepted some influence from a junior, Francis Grant, who became R.A. at the age of forty-eight, in the year of Alken's death. They are illustrated here, a Meet, a Full Cry, and two Deaths. One Death is particularly ambitious in conception, its design based on a frieze of equestrian portraits in the foreground and culminating behind on a small hill ; a pyramidal arrangement and a pleasant landscape tenderly handled. The hill itself does not look solid enough, and the composition has gaps ; but surely the picture is very notable as a big conception handled with grace and knowledge ?

Two drawings in the Behrens collection belong to another series of studies—racehorses on the flat and near the winning post : the climax of equine speed, therefore. In both the massed illusion of " swishing pace " has fine metre and rhythm, but one is far better than the other because in it Alken feels with convincing truth and power that so much action from a





Note the parson steadying his horse and the white-legged chestnut measuring the fence he is going to jump.

Full Cry in a Favouring Country.  
this picture is among the best in Alken's work.

The brown horse is just landing. As a complete composition

*From the oil painting in Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection.*









# THE KILL.

This painting, one of the most original of Henry Alken's hunting compositions, is thought to be a portrait group, but the hunt is unknown. There are gaps in its design, but the pyramidal conception is a new thing in English sporting art of Alken's time. Note the little throughbred brown horse on our left, how full he is of life and character; and his rider is being saluted by the master on the hill top, and also by a horseman in the right foreground. Some others of the hunt look towards him, so this rider is too important to remain unnamed. Let us try to find the key of this picture!

*From the oil painting in Lord and Lady Daresbury's Collection.*









HIS FIRST RACE.  
*From an original drawing in the Oliver Behrens Collection.*



STEEPLECHASING—AT THE BROOK.  
*From an original drawing in the Oliver Behrens Collection.*







group of three onrushing horses should react upon his composition, so he introduces two groups of spectators, one in the middle-distance sketched full-face, and a nearer group in dark mass, one agitated man in a long coat having his back towards us.

I showed these studies of top speed to Selwyn Image, late Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford, and he said at once of the better one, "The real thing! If we wish to see in art an illusion of the swiftest movement from horses, here it is, complete!"\*

Tested by photography Alken is wrong; tested by the illusion he produces, he defeats photography with ease; so I forget photography and enjoy Alken's conventions, though his winner's forelegs look rather unfit for victory.

Other Alkens in the Greenall and Behrens Collections have horsemen in twos and threes, with or without distant members of the hunt. Six colour-plates all from original drawings, that form a set called "A Steeplechase," dating from 1826-27—show a great contrast between two crack riders, White and Blue. As they belong to the same period as Captain Ross's contest, on Clinker, against Mr. Douglas, on Radical, some judges believe that they represent this race. If so, they do not illustrate the race itself, but Nimrod's glorification of it, which must have been irony, for the riders were laughed at by onlookers. Osbaldeston said of their mishaps: "Two greater tailors never exhibited in a steeplechase." Dick Christian piloted Ross, and described the captain as a "poor hand across country without someone to lead him. Couldn't make his own running nohow, but 'd go anywhere anyone else went; a bold man, and a good creature he was too. He gave me £100 when Clinker beat Radical."

Alken himself engraved his drawings for "A Steeplechase" in 1827. Plate II., where Blue leads White over an Old Blind Roadway, is, I think, the best that Alken ever made of the "in and out clever." Not that he

\* Though this monograph is not concerned with H. A.'s occasional pictures and prints of Turf history, I wish to draw attention to a small oil-painting of racing portraiture in Mr. A. Dunn Gardner's Collection at Denston Hall, near Newmarket. It represents John Scott, *watch in hand* at an early morning trial between Cotherstone and Princess. Cotherstone in 1843 won the Derby and 2,000 Guineas, and Princess, a year later, won the Oaks.



ever liked this double jumping, for he scoffed at it rather in *Beauties and Defects* when writing about the Flying Leap over a double timber fence, ditch between. "To hunt in a country where such fences are used, . . . requires a horse well qualified, for to get on with any speed, the leaps must be made at once. I have been heartily tired even to see the trouble and patience it requires to perform the in and out."

He wanted to see both fences taken in a flight, as Dick Christian—on King of the Valley—leaps them in a picture from the Grand Leicestershire set in Major Magniac's collection. His other views on a flying leap are interesting, because they enable us to see in his work when and how he modifies them into variations. "The horse should be possessed of great strength and courage, for here he springs from all four legs at the same time, or at least so nearly so that the difference is not perceptible. *The forelegs should be tucked tight under the body, the hind ones thrown as high and as far out as possible.*" This precept is followed in Plate III. of "Leicestershire Covers," and in the third plate of "A Steeplechase"; but in many of Alken's drawings the forelegs are more or less outstretched throughout a flying leap.

Alken is attracted—now and then—by the old standing leap; see Plate II. of "A Steeplechase," where White's horse halts at the inner fence and prepares to jump. And a hunter in the same position is illustrated in *Beauties and Defects*, Plate XV., and Alken says there that the horse should measure the ground correctly, throwing his quarters well under him at the last stride; then "he can form a centre to his weight on his hind feet when he is at full rise, and be able in a standing leap to keep that balance, until he feels able to make his throw or spring. At the moment when he opens his forelegs the hind ones should be caught quite under the body, for in slow and steady leaps it is almost impossible for the horse to extend his legs behind, and leap with the same safety as he can when gathered together. For instance, in double leaps, where the horse is not able to see on the other side, which is very often the case, by throwing his quarters under him the animal has the power to renew his leap with safety."





PLATE I THE STAMP. OFF THEY GO—WITH WHITE FOR CHOICE.  
*The Ollivier Collection.*









PLATE II.—GOING OVER AN OLD BLIND ROADWAY, AND DOING IT WELL : EVEN BETTING.  
*The Oliver Behrens Collection.*









PLATE III.—A SLAP AT A STONE ENCLOSURE. 5 TO 4 ON WHITE.  
*The Oliver Behrens Collection.*









PLATE IV.—CROSSING A DEEP RAVINE DANGEROUS TO PASS—WITH 6 TO 2 ON WHITE.  
*The Oliver B. Jones Collection.*









PLATE V.—COVERING A STRONG BULLOCK FENCE. DOWN FOR A HUNDRED !—ANY ODDS ON WHITE.  
*The Colonel's Beguiling Collection.*







WINDMILL HAYING SERIES



PLATE VI. THE WINNER, "AND TO SUCH WONDROUS DOING BROUGHT HIS HORSE."—*Hamlet*.  
*The Oliver Behrens Collection.*







Sometimes, in H. A.'s work, we find there is a semi-flying leap, perhaps contrasted with a standing jump, as in "Two of the Right Sort over Hurdles." Weight rather than momentum is expressed by this drawing. In "Steeplechasing, at The Brook," the mood is different, and the rails are just low enough to trick one of three horses into a tripping accident.

One leap, illustrated and criticised in *Beauties and Defects*, is very uncommon in H. A.'s prints and drawings, and it is the very leaping that got him into "four or five falls a day, upon an average, for the first season," when training "a mare which practised the bucking leap." He describes this leap as similar to the action of a deer, "and a horse performing it," he says, "displays a very grand and prepossessing appearance." Few "but very hot horses follow this method, which certainly is not a good one." Its "action requires great exertion, on the part of the rider and his horse, an effort which is not at all calculated for endurance"; and "it is very dangerous, as a horse addicted to it seldom knows where to spring, or to take off from, or how to measure his leap. . . . Very often it occurs that, having his head cleaving the air, he entirely forgets to put his forelegs down to the ground, and consequently comes bolt on his knees and chest."

So we learn how Alken's falls occurred on his buck-leaping mare, "four years old, and excessively violent." As he rode her through a whole season, bearing four or five falls a day, I think his tenacity as foolhardy as Mytton's. Two or three portraits of this mare must be extant somewhere. H. A. cannot have failed to get some profit of art from her adventures, surely? It is a horse, not a mare, that comes towards us over a fence, deer leaping, in Plate XVII. of *Beauties and Defects*.

Though Alken in this book studies the good and bad points in horses, he gives no description of good hunters as telling as the one that Dick Christian, in reminiscent talk, gave to the Druid. "Give me 'em lengthy," said Dick, "and short-legged for Leicestershire. I wouldn't have 'em no bigger than fifteen-three; great rump, hips, and hocks; forelegs well

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afore them, and good shoulders ; thoroughbred if you can get them, but none of your high short horses. Thoroughbred horses make the best hunters. I never heard of a great thing yet but it was done by a thoroughbred horse. . . .”

Genius, too, in pictures and prints of hunting and racing, should have the qualities of a thoroughbred horse well trained. Henry Alken was the first British artist who understood this cardinal fact. No doubt he was aided by circumstances, the fields of England becoming better drained, less difficult to ride over ; and the specialised breeding of farm animals, which began before the middle of the eighteenth century, made hedges and ditched timber fences more and more necessary.

Once—and it was during his best period—he put all his finest qualities into a unique *tour de force*, a set of twelve tiny etched plates of foxhunting, only  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches by 3 inches, yet showing in each of the set many figures and a great extent of country. H. A. distributed these gems among his friends. I have never seen a complete set. General Cowie has two of the etchings, with titles in H. A.’s handwriting, and he saw a whole set in 1878, when he was a boy. He had 5s. in his pocket, and the twelve etchings, framed separately, were priced at £5 ! Not a penny more, though the shop was near to Tattersall’s !

And now, before we turn to the final chapter of this monograph, let us bring before our minds these particular sets of pictures and prints in which H. A. endeavoured to give permanent expression to his favourite qualities. There is the ever-famous Quorn Hunt series, for instance, that illustrates one of the finest runs in the hunting experiences of Squire Osbaldeston. There are eight pictures in this great set, and four of them are illustrated here.

When the Quorn Hunt prints were published, in 1834, the *New Sporting Magazine* welcomed them as the “very best and most popular series of hunting subjects ever offered to the sporting world.” There was a touch of advertising in this laudation. Alken was obliged to work so



PLATE I.—THE MEET AT ASHBY PASTURES.  
Showing Osbaldeston (centre) with his Hounds and Jack Stevens on left.

THE QUORN HUNT.

*Engraved by F. C. Lewis after Henry Alken, in 1835, illustrating Nimrod's famous article on Hunting published by the Quarterly Review, No. xciii. Reproduced by courtesy of Messrs. Robson & Co., Ltd., Hanover Street, London, W.*



The Meet.

The Eight Prints of the Quorn Hunt Series, engraved by F. C. Lewis after Henry Alken, in 1835, illustrating Nimrod's famous article on Hunting published by the *Quarterly Review*, No. xciii. Reproduced by courtesy of Messrs. Robson & Co., Ltd., Hanover Street, London, W.







rapidly, in order to fulfil an urgent commission, that he could not do complete justice to himself. Thus the horses are all, or nearly all, too much alike in shape, and in movement and character. So we are tempted to speak of them as recipe horses. For all that, the episodes are vividly conceived, and there is no break in the creative emotion that flows through them rhythmically.

Another set of eight subjects illustrates the Grand Leicestershire Steeplechase, which was run in 1829. It appeals to us in two different ways artistically, for the prints of it, by Bentley, differ in many respects from the pictures in oils that Alken painted expressly for his patron and friend, Mr. Hollingworth Magniac. As a rule, the differences of conception and spacing show that Alken made improvements for Mr. Magniac, and that the oil-pictures were painted after Bentley had finished his plates from another set of designs. The illustrations in this monograph show the Grand Leicestershire Steeplechase in blocks taken from the small oil paintings.

Nimrod is in the first plate, on horseback, and reading the articles. Anyone was to be considered distanced if he opened a gate, or went more than 100 yards along a road, or impeded another rider at a fence, or rode over a fallen competitor; and as good sportmanship in the 1820's and later was often more active in principle than in practice, in words than in deeds, a competitor was disqualified "if discovered within three days after the race to have directly or indirectly caused any fence to be broken or cut down." No servant, again, was to be allowed to ride for the stake.

A sweepstake of ten sovereigns each for hunters at 13 stone, four miles over Leicestershire, was drawn up by Mr. White at Melton, with fifty added by Sir Francis Mackenzie of Ross-shire. They raced from Nowsley Wood to Billesden Coplow, about four miles, with some real rasps on the way. Only one horse of the seven did not have a fall; it was Polecat, ridden by Captain Ross, who had a minor mishap, losing his stirrup leather in a stiff bullfinch. I have put enough



text under the illustrations to show how the race was run from start to finish.

In these compositions Henry Alken is to be viewed as a brilliant journalist, an illustrator of known events. It was only from time to time that he was able to work for his own pleasure, *con amore*, for the need of money pressed upon him incessantly.

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QUORN HUNT.



Tally-ho! and away.

“‘He’s gone,’ exclaims Lord Alvanley. . . . ‘Ware hounds,’ cries Sir Harry Goodricke. ‘Give them time,’ exclaims Mr. John Moore. ‘That’s right,’ says Mr. Osbaldeston, ‘spoil your own sport as usual.’ . . . The scent being good, every hound settles to his fox, and a terrible burst is the result.”—(NIXON.) Mr. Maher is on the left above the hounds, Mr. Holyoake next to him. Lord Alvanley and Mr. Moore are in the middle foreground, just in front of the Squire, who is followed by Mr. Cradock and Sir Harry Goodricke. — *From a Proof lent by Messrs. Robson & Co.*

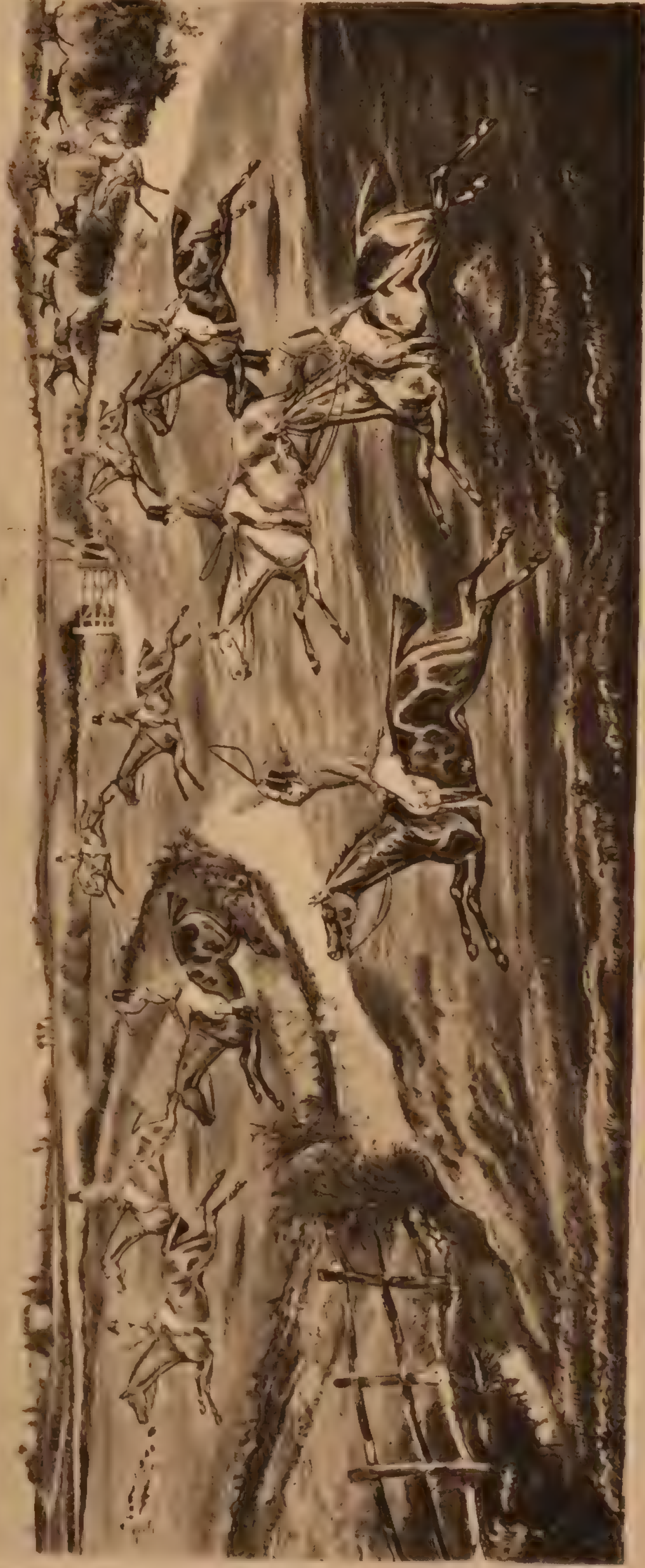






THE QUORN HUNT.

Painted by  
Rudolph Ackermann,  
101 Regent Street.



( Full-cry—Second Horses. )

“ Another short check enables thirteen men out of two hundred to get their second horses, and the hounds again settle to the scent at a truly killing pace. ‘ Hold hard, Holyoake,’ exclaims Mr. Osbaldeston (now mounted on Blucher) . . . ‘ pray don’t press ‘em too hard.’ . . . ‘ He’s taking a capital line,’ exclaims Sir Harry Goodricke. ‘ Worth a dozen Reform Bills,’ shouts Sir Francis Burdett, sitting erect upon Sampson and putting his head straight at a yawner. ‘ We shall have the Whissendine Brook,’ cries Mr. Maher.”—(NIMROD.) Captain Berkeley is in the centre of the foreground ; near him (behind) are Lord Alvanley and Sir F. Burdett. *From a Proof lent by Messrs. Robson & Co.*







THE QUORN HUNT.

Printed by J. S. Kinnaird,  
10, Regent Street.



Lord Romney  
The WhisSENDINE appears in view.

When the pack is seen, the hounds are in the middle of the field, and the pack appears in view. The hounds are in the middle of the field, and the pack appears in view. The hounds are in the middle of the field, and the pack appears in view.

“Six men, out of twelve, take it in their stride; three find themselves in the middle of it. The gallant Frank Forester is among the latter. ‘Who is that under his horse in the brook?’ enquires Mr. Green, of Rolleston, whose noted old mare had just skimmed over the water. ‘Only Dick Christian,’ answers Lord Forester, ‘and it is nothing new to him.’ ‘But he’ll be drowned,’ exclaims Lord Kinnaird. ‘I shouldn’t wonder,’ observes Mr. Coke. But the pace is too good to enquire.”—(NIMROD.)—From a Proof lent by Messrs. Robson & Co.







## CHAPTER SIX

### The Alkens and Their Birthplace

THE surname Alken, with a Van before it, appears in George Virtue's manuscripts, Vol. VII., under the date 1749, I think in error for Van Achen. "The genious Mr. Joseph Van Alken, painter, having catch'd cold, fell into a fever of which in about a fortnight's time he dyd, aged about 50. Had been 30 years or more in England. A man of good complexion, a good round face and shortish stature, a small cast with one eye. He left no issue by his wife. Left a younger brother also a painter, who constantly lived with him, and works in the same way, but his skill in the art said to be much short of his brother. However, Mr. Hudson has engaged him (as a painter of draperies, etc.) . . ."

This passage is worth quoting, because neither Achen nor Alken is an English surname. We find Alken as a place name, a village, both in Rhenish Prussia, near Coblenz, and also in Limbourg, not far south of Hasselt. Note, too, in Henry Alken's family, the choice of Seffrien as a Christian name—a foreign name also. Gilbey's information, collected from Henry's grandchildren, Miss Lanham and Charles Alken, speaks of the family as Danish, with the name of Seffrien. But certain ancestors "became involved in the political disturbances during Christian VII.'s reign," and "were compelled, in or about the year 1772, to fly the country, changing their name to that of Alken, which is the name of a little village consisting of a few farmhouses about fifteen miles south-west of Aarhus in North Jutland. The refugees on their arrival in England settled in Suffolk, but at a later date the family moved to London, taking a house in Francis Street, Tottenham Court Road."

One of these immigrants, in Gilbey's account, was a young man of about twenty-two, called Samuel Alken, and Gilbey regards him—



erroneously—as Henry’s uncle. Another—who remains without a Christian name in Gilbey’s research—became Henry’s father, and the father also of two other artistic sons, George, senior, and John Seffrien, who in Kendall’s information is Seffrien John. To Kendall, again, as we have seen, Henry’s father is Samuel Alken, senior.

The Danish tradition is very notable, but the change of name and its political cause must have occurred before Christian VII. came to the throne in 1746, because a year earlier two members of the family were settled in London as partners in the artistic trade of carving and gilding. This important information we owe to Mr. Kendall. They were brothers, and their Christian names were Oliver and Seffrien. In 1769 Oliver Alken died in Little Titchfield Street, leaving two children—a married daughter, Anne Richter, and a son, Seffrien II., who served as clerk on board H.M. sloop *Pegasus*, and who died abroad about 1778 at the age of twenty-four. He willed everything to his sister, Anne Richter, and his sister proved his will.

As for Oliver’s brother and partner, Seffrien Alken, senior, in the year 1745 he set up his home with his wife, Eleanor, at No. 3, Dufours Place, off Broad Street, Golden Square. It was a new house, like the rest of Dufours Place and its court, built on the old Pest House Fields for families of the middle class who wished to live quietly, and still be “genteel.” I have seen the principal rooms in No. 3, wainscoted from floor to ceiling; they are so small that not one is big enough to be used conveniently as a studio. To-day there are many tenements in the houses of Dufours Place, but in old Seffrien’s time and much later the little backwater, looking trim and dignified, was liked by professional men, though commonly known as Duffers’ Place. Even now, as my photograph shows, it has an eighteenth-century pride of race, rather out-at-elbows.

But the address, 3, Dufours Place, needs no explanation. It will be found on one of the earliest prints published by the elder Samuel Alken, a coloured aquatint after Thomas Rowlandson, dated 1786, and showing four good sketches made at a theatre. At an earlier date, on the other hand,



## THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE, 1829

A Series of Eight Small Oil Paintings by Henry Alken

### First Picture



Nimrod on horseback reading the articles. Seven riders. The skittish grey, ridden by Dick Christian, is Mr. Maxse's horse, King of the Valley. The horseman nearest to Dick Christian is Mr. Heycock, whose mount is Captain Ross's brown horse, Clinker. Check by jowl with Heycock is Captain Becher in a red coat, on Mr. Barclay's bay gelding Bantam. The fourth rider, Captain Ross, has a bay mare named Polecat, and the fifth, Mr. Nicholson, looks proudly confident on Sir Harry Goodricke's Magic, a famous bay gelding. Draw a horizontal line towards the right from the crown of Nicholson's top hat to the next rider's. This man is Bill Wright, in a blue coat, and he rides a bay mare called Lazy Bet. The seventh sportsman, in the foreground right, is Mr. Guildford on Sir F. Mackenzie's Spartacus.

*Collection of Major Oswald Magniac.*







## THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE

Second Picture



Captain Ross on Polecat making the pace for Clinker. He lost his stirrup leather before covering two miles. Mr. Nicholson, always cool and determined, has gained an advantage for Magic by taking a line to the left of the others, in order to evade two bad obstacles.







in the R.A. catalogue of 1780, the address given by Samuel Alken is No. 3, *Dufours Court*, not *Place*. Why? The little Place ended in a court, No. 3 stood where the court portion began, and no other house in the quiet backwater was numbered 3.

Seffrien Alken was twenty-two when he married Eleanor, widow of William Broadmead, in 1739. Eleanor had a daughter, Anne Broadmead, and she married Seffrien Alken's brother, Oliver. Eleanor Alken died intestate in 1752, and the administration of her estate was granted, on March 17th, 1752, to her daughter Anne, then Anne Alken.

About a year later Seffrien Alken married again, and soon the registers of St. James's Church, Piccadilly, the parish church for Dufours Place, began to record the baptisms of his children. From 1751 to 1762 there are a dozen entries, sons and daughters appearing concurrently to Seffrien and to Oliver. Separating the two families, the children of Oliver and his wife were—Eleanor, 1751, Sarah, 1753, Seffrien 1754, Anne 1756, William 1760, and Mary 1762. To Seffrien and his second wife, Anne, living at No. 3, Dufours Place, were born—Mary 1754, Anne 1755, Samuel 1756, Oliver 1759, and Martin 1761.

A Martin Alken in Gilbey's information emigrates to America and becomes a mill-owner in one of the eastern States. Martin's brother, Oliver, junior, died in infancy. As for Samuel (Samuel senior), hitherto he has been very troublesome, partly because the date and place of his birth remained unknown. But now, thanks to Mr. Kendall's researches in parish records, it is known that he was baptised at St. James' Church, Piccadilly, on November 4th, 1756, and that his birth occurred on October 22nd.

He grew into a boy very fond of art, and his father's high reputation as a fine carver in both stone and wood brought him intimately in touch with good craftsmen, and also with some architects, such as his father's friend, John Oldfield, an architect of Scotland Yard. The father, Seffrien senior, died in 1782, and his widow and his eldest son proved the will on May 8th, 1782, power being reserved to a third executor, John Oldfield.



Samuel Alken stepped into his father's shoes as tenant of No. 3, Dufours Place. He was twenty-six years old, and a student of architecture and decoration. Indeed, a design by him in architecture for a monument was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1780, and a year earlier he published at 2s. 6d., *A New Book of Ornaments*, with six designs of a classic nature that would be of use to carvers and architectural students. Samuel was proficient as an architectural draughtsman, and could etch a copper plate, an accomplishment that few young architects had then acquired. We may infer from these facts that Samuel Alken, impressed by his father's work for architects, and particularly for Sir William Chambers, had made up his mind to be an architect; but a change occurred in his life, and he became a famous aquatinter and a clever etcher. Perhaps he was active in two professions simultaneously, decoration and print-making.

It is a great pleasure to come upon his aquatints and etchings. Once he collaborated with Bartolozzi in a really noble print after Wheatley, showing how the Duke of Newcastle returned from shooting. The finest impression of this tinted engraving is in Major Magniac's collection. Note, too, his work in aquatint after Morland. In 1790 he and Rowlandson worked together on a shooting series after Morland, Sam Alken adding aquatint to Rowlandson's etching; and two years later he signed a plate called "Evening, Sportsmen Refreshing." Then in 1801, through J. R. Smith, he issued a pair of aquatints, "Sportsmen Refreshing" and "The Rabbit Warren." He worked also with Wickstead and after Howitt. Further, in 1793 he collaborated with George Garrard, in order to do a large aquatint after a chestnut racehorse named Soldier, a son of Eclipse, and in Dennis O'Kelly's stables. There is no hesitation in the handling of this print. Samuel Alken shows that the anatomy of horses is not unknown to him.

As an engraver of landscape, mountain and lake scenery in North Wales, Ireland and England, the elder Samuel is a charming artist, and when he tinted his aquatints himself, as he did in several books, he has a very original sense of colour, quiet, deep-toned and impressive. This part



## THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE

'Third Picture



Captain Ross still leads, but Dick Christian comes up second on King of the Valley, with Spartacus and Clinker close behind, and Lazy Bet within a length of them. Ross, in taking what he thought to be an easy place, found it was an enclosed pound, but got well over it.







## THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE

Fourth Picture



Captain Ross still ahead with Dick Christian close up and in the act of taking the ditch and double rails. Becher, as you see, is taking a tremendous toss, and Bantam is completely out of it afterwards. Bill Wright, Mr. Guildford and Mr. Heycock are still well in the running.







## THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE

Fifth Picture



Mr. Heycock on Clinker, gets the lead at half-way. Dick Christian comes a cropper, and Captain Ross (who lost his stirrup-leather) is thrown in the last field, while two more bad tumbles are unseating Mr. Nicholson (his only mishap) and Mr. Guildford. The latter was rolled by his horse Spartacus, and badly hurt. Behind them is Bill Wright.







## THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLCHASE

South Parade



At Billesdon Down. Dick Christian takes a header for his last fall ; but, being used to it by now, he picked himself up and went on as hard as ever. Mr. Heycock keeps Clinker in the lead, followed by Mr. Field Nicholson and Bill Wright.







## THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE

Seventh Picture



Clinker, having made the running from the half-way, is a good sixty yards ahead, when he makes a mistake at a ditch within two fields from home. The bridge slips over his head, and his last chance is gone! Mr. Field Nicholson keeps his place well; and as for Dick Christian, he seems to have forgotten his last fall entirely. Not one of the horses shows enough fatigue.







## THE GRAND LEICESTERSHIRE STEEPLECHASE

Eighth and Final Picture



The winning post at Billesdon Coplow, with Mr. Valentine Maher judging. Mr. Field Nicholson, on Magic, defeats Dick Christian, on King of the Valley, but by only a bit more than a length. Bill Wright is behind, taking a spill at the last fence. Mr. Heycock is in at the finish, in the fourth place; surely a remarkable achievement, since his mount, Clinker, lost the bridle in the seventh episode.







of his work contradicts the fact that as early as 1785 he came into intimate touch with that too convivial life which Rowlandson enjoyed, and which afterwards brought Morland to an early death.

Let us turn now to a question : How is Samuel, senior, to be connected with the Danish tradition ? A visit to Denmark with his father in 1772 would have made him acquainted with a great tragedy, which culminated three years later in the death of the girl Queen, Matilda, sister of our King George III. In 1772 Matilda was imprisoned in the Castle of Zell, and her supposed lover, Count Struenzee, was beheaded. If we suppose that Samuel Alken and his father did visit Copenhagen in those bad times, then family talk of their experiences, passing through more than 100 years to Miss Lanham, might easily have mingled together *two* Danish traditions, the earlier one being the change of the family name from Seffrien to Alken. Something of this sort must have happened, for Gilbey's authorities certainly were not cheats, so they cannot have invented a Danish origin and a change of surname.

Samuel, senior, and his wife, Lydia, in Mr. Kendall's information, have three sons ; but I think we must add a fourth from Gilbey, George, senior. The eldest son, Samuel, junior, was born April 10th, 1784 ; the second boy, Henry—christened Henry Thomas—we have studied ; and the third, Seffrien John, came into the world at No. 2, Francis Street, Tottenham Court Road, in 1796.

The birthplace of Samuel senior's fourth son, George, senior, is unknown. He and S. J. Alken, in Gilbey's account, shared a studio at 15, Southampton Row, and George was the more gifted. For many years S. J. Alken lived in New Road, Edgware Road, and for a few years at Great Marlow. I have searched many times for his work, but vainly. He may have painted certain angling pictures in oil, signed either Alken or S. Alken, and we may owe to him or to his brother George, senior, some of those unsigned paintings and drawings now attributed to their brother Henry, or to their brother Samuel, junior, in which horses gallop in the old rocking-horse manner.



The elder Samuel died at the age of sixty, in the autumn of 1815, and was taken to be buried in the parish of his birth. The date of his funeral was November 9th, as you will find by consulting the St. James's register of burials.

Samuel made a very brief will, as Mr. Kendall has discovered :

“ September the 22nd, in the year of our Lord 1815, I, Samuel Alken, in the parish of St. Pancras, Middlesex. To my eldest son, Samuel, I bequeath one shilling. To my wife Lydia I give and bequeath all my property, real and personal, to be by her enjoyed to the fullest extent. Witness my hand, Samuel Alken, in the presence of John Laforney Butler and William Hallyer.”

As no executor was named, the widow applied for letters of administration, and they were granted to her on January 5th, 1816.

It is not yet known why the elder Samuel, in his last will and testament, remembered only one of his children. He may have been alarmed and annoyed by Henry's adventures in the hunting field, which had then begun.

The younger Samuel was an artist also, but little is known of his career. In his fortieth year, or thereabouts, he disappeared suddenly from view, as though carried off by an epidemic, perhaps of small-pox.

The work assigned to him cannot be that of his first period, for it belongs to a very short span of years—1820–23, apart from a few examples of a slightly earlier date, and also a set of eight coloured pencil drawings of Stockbridge Races, signed S. Alken, junr., youthful exercises and perhaps copies. The later work includes oil-paintings, prints and drawings, and ranges from many varieties of outdoor sport to sport as known in the night clubs of London ; also to scenes of George IV.'s visit to Dublin about 1821. Hudson was one of his publishers, and Thomas Kelly another. But I have seen only a few things signed S. Alken, junr., and those which I have seen—the eight drawings illustrating Stockbridge Races—were amateurish. Nothing known to me is signed Sam or Samuel Alken, junr. ; *so the younger Samuel either behaved unfairly to his father, as Henry Gordon Alken did to his own, or he worked so often for his*





DUFOURS PLACE, BROAD STREET, GOLDEN SQUARE.  
The birthplace of Henry Alken and his brother Sam Alken, junior. The house with the lamp is No. 4, the one on the left of it No. 3, where Henry was born in 1785.



AN ALKEN SCHOOL PICTURE. LANDSCAPE WITH ANGLER LANDING A FISH.







HUNTING SCENES.



ALKEN SCHOOL PICTURES.

*In the upper one, "The Find," there are examples of the rocking-horse gallop.*







father, in a sort of family school, that he saw nothing wrong in the signature he used after his father's death. Gilbey and his assistants were deceived, for they blended the two Samuels into one artist, who was something of a dandy in his dress, and acted for a time as tutor to the Earl of Clarendon.

Which Samuel and which Earl of Clarendon? I choose the fourth Earl—George William Frederick Villiers, statesman, who lived from 1800 to 1870. In early boyhood he could have received lessons from either of the Samuel Alkens, lessons in drawing, let us assume; but in an age of so much drink, and of loose manners, his parents may have had reason to think that a distinguished old engraver would be safer than a much younger tutor.

In Gilbey's research all the S. Alken prints, drawings and paintings are given to Samuel Alken, senior. This, no doubt, is manifestly wrong, but only one Alken, the elder Samuel, had and has the right to be known as S. Alken. When the younger Samuel used this signature he was a trickster, if not a cheat.

Some writers have given him a series of drawings engraved for the *Annals of Sporting and Fancy Gazette*, and published between 1821 and 1823. Perhaps they are right; or the elder Samuel may have left some unfinished plates which he was doing in collaboration with his eldest son. In any case, some remarkable facts are associated with this work. Though there are twenty-six drawings in all, aquatinted by T. Sutherland, Percy Roberts and J. Gleadah, not one of the inscriptions speaks of a Sam or Samuel Alken, junior, though two styles are present in some of the drawings. Below one print the inscription is Alken, and below another *Alkin*; no fewer than nineteen are inscribed to S. *Alkin*, and only four to S. Alken; but when the magazine's text refers to the artist, S. Alken is printed. And several times a print is said to have been both drawn and engraved by S. Alken. If so, the magazine contradicts the print's inscription, where the artist is never named as the engraver also.

These matters make the Alken labyrinth more troublesome. In one respect the elder Samuel is easy to follow, for his style as aquatinter and



soft-ground etcher is a guide from about 1785 ; and no work can be his which has costumes in it later than those which came into vogue *before* 1815. But since many sporting costumes were varieties of uniform that changed slowly in cut and fashion, we need caution here as elsewhere.

In difficult questions of art expertism, we should seek as much help as we can get from the watermarks on old paper. At the end of last year, 1926, I received some aid of this particular sort from a collector at Sheffield, Mr. Frank Bowman, who has found watermark dates on four large lithographic prints which are probably by the younger Samuel Alken. These four prints belong to a collection of fifteen, all unlettered and undated, but twelve are signed in lithography on the prints. The paper is Whatman. Here are the subjects, together with full details :

			Ins. high	Ins.		
Fox Hunting	...	...	10.2	by 16.5	Sam Alken	W. M. 1823
Do.	...	...	10.1	by 16.6	Saml. Alken	—
Otter Hunting	...	...	10.2	by 16.2	—	—
Racing	...	...	9.9	by 16.4	Sam Alken	—
Coursing	...	...	10.3	by 15.8	S. Alken	—
Do.	...	...	10.0	by 16.4	Do.	W. M. 1820
Pheasant Shooting	...	...	10.0	by 16.3	Do.	—
Partridge	do.	...	10.0	by 16.1	—	—
Woodcock	do.	...	10.0	by 16.0	S. Alken	W. M. 1823
Snipe	do.	...	10.0	by 16.4	Sam Alken	—
Fishing	...	...	10.0	by 16.4	Do.	—
Do.	...	...	10.2	by 15.8	—	—
Badger Digging	...	...	10.5	by 16.3	S. Alken	W. M. 1823
Ferreting Rabbits	...	...	10.6	by 16.6	S. Alken	
Shooting Deer (separated from the herd in a Park)	...	...	10	by 16	S. Alken	

In this collection the S. Alken prints number seven, and three of them have watermark dates ; three prints have no lithographic signature, and seven are signed by a Sam Alken—Sam Alken, junior, we may believe, as the watermark dates are much later than the elder Samuel's death.

Let us pass on to another matter. There is a noteworthy and valuable print in colour dating from 1822, engraved by J. Pollard after a





HORSEMAN TROTTER.



GROUSE SHOOTING.

The first picture is signed Alken only and belongs to the mystery group. Its style is unlike Henry's and Henry Gordon's and the paintings signed S. Alken. The shooting picture is by Sam Alken—query senior or junior?













HUNTERS AT COVER SIDE—FLY AND DASH, A CHESTNUT AND A BROWN HORSE, LATE THE PROPERTY OF COL. THORNTON.

From an aquatint by J. Pollard, 1822, after the picture by S. Alken. Lord Daresbury has the original and the signature is S. Alken, which only Samuel Alken, senior, had the right to use.



painting by "S. Alken," and entitled: "Hunters at Coverside, Fly and Dash, late the property of Col. Thornton." Study the illustration, and remember that the very eccentric Col. Thomas Thornton, born in 1757, died in Paris on March 10th, 1823. At the close of his life he had a great wish to be a Frenchman. After Waterloo, then, he hired the Château de Chambord, then bought an estate at Pont-sur-Seine, and ventured to style himself Prince de Chambord and Marquis de Pont. Two years later he obtained legal domicile in France, but he never got his heart's desire, naturalisation. Pictures help to make us acquainted with many peculiar characters in old-time sport, and all pictorial records of Thornton rise higher and higher in market prices. Thanks to one of the S. Alkens we have portraits of Fly and Dash, two of Thornton's hunters; but is it possible to say which S. Alken painted the picture? Some experts have given their attribution to the younger Samuel, while law and trade custom uphold the elder Samuel; he alone had a right to use the signature. The original picture of Fly and Dash is in Lord Daresbury's collection.

In fishing pictures and prints, and in shooting also, there are similar problems; and two angling examples may be chosen for comment in this chapter. One of them is illustrated facing p. 50; it is signed merely Alken. Its subject appears also in a variant, with the dog left out. The trees come from a school imitation of Henry Alken, but the touch is not so delicate and gracious. Henry Gordon's trees—in his best work—are much nearer to his father's than the trees in this fishing picture. Again, Mr. Arthur Gilbey has an oil-picture of "Perch Fishing" signed S. Alken, very interesting as an English landscape belonging to the same tradition as several angling pieces painted in the 1830's by W. Jones, and discovered by Mr. Arthur Gilbey. I decline to be at all confident towards these S. Alkens, preferring to wait till much more is known about Seffrien and Seffrien John. Why shouldn't we believe that the younger Samuel, and several other minor Alkens, worked sometimes for Samuel, senior, and sometimes for Henry the Great? Henry's prodigious output in different lines of work certainly suggests a studio school, for it is very unequal, and



much is poor potboiling. Some very delicate studies of horses are signed S. Alken, they are youthful in their pretty technique, and also very perplexing. Do they come from the elder Samuel? If so, he was once a student of horses and a miniaturist in style. To give them to the younger Samuel is to raise the question: "Why did he fail to sign S. Alken, junr.?" Major Magniac has two examples in water-colour, signed S. Alken and Sam Alken. For the rest, a very considerable amount of work, either unsigned or incompletely signed, now given to one of the Samuels, should be sold always as school work only; and art dealers and cataloguers should never fail to distinguish between the two Henrys. Work by the younger one should always be catalogued as by Henry Gordon Alken, this being the name by which he was known at home. Pictures and drawings by Henry Gordon should never be sold as by H. Alken, though they are frequently.\*

One of his pictures was sold recently as his father's work, and such transactions make the Alken labyrinth more and more difficult. The real Henry Alken needs our defence against all unfair attacks on his reputation, for sportsmen owe more to him than to any other artist of his period who appealed to the Big Public. Gillray, Bunbury, Rowlandson, invite us frequently to paddle in the gutters of social life. No such invitation comes from Henry Alken. His work as a whole has a natural sentiment of delicacy; it owes nothing to prurience or curiosity. We can say with truth of Henry Alken what Andrew Lang said of Dumas: "The air which he breathes is a healthy air, is the open air; and that by his own choice, for he had every temptation to seek another kind of vogue, and every opportunity."

Then there is the influence that he had on other illustrative artists, notably Phiz and Leech; and even Randolph Caldecott gained much from Ben Tally Ho!

\* A very useful catalogue of prints published by the Victoria and Albert Museum, and treating of Modern Etchings and Aquatints of the British and American Schools, refers to Henry Alken, jun., in the case of two prints:

1. The Funeral Procession of Arthur, Duke of Wellington. London, published by Ackermann & Co., 96, Strand.

*Aquatint.* Folding panoramic view. By H. Alken and G. A. Sala. See *Notes and Queries*, 3 S. XII., p. 155, 1867.

2. The Race and the Road, Epsom. 1851. Ackermann & Co., Strand. Folding panoramic view. 4½ × 93½.



Ferneley, too, when he painted his Count Sandor episodes, and some go-ahead, swishing full cries, was inspired by H. A.'s gaiety, frankness and enterprise. What was Sandor himself but a copy of H. A.'s Myttonish variety? But action and reaction being always equal and opposite, there were sporting painters who rejected Alken's influence; they preferred quiet and suave portraiture to daring movements, and became wonderfully popular during Early Victorian times. A certain "sweetness" came into sporting art with Landseer, Herring and Francis Grant, and Henry Alken was never "sweet." He knew too much about it.

WALTER SHAW SPARROW.



















